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General Assembly
Twenty-seventh special session

Official Records

5th meeting
Friday, 10 May 2002, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

The President: I should like to inform members that, by a letter dated 6 May 2002 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Economic and Social Council expressed his wish to make a statement in the debate in plenary meeting at this special session.

After consultations and in the absence of objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to hear a statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council in the debate in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, President of the Republic of Haiti.

President Aristide (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to greet participants in this special session on behalf of the children of Haiti, who are preparing to celebrate in 2004 the bicentenary of our independence.

Approximately 1,122,000 Haitian children under 5 years old — 14 per cent of our population — dream of happiness and of love. So too, the 3,897,000 children under 18 years old — 49 per cent of our population — dream of a new Haiti and of a better world. Their dreams lead us to explore their collective unconscious and to bring their rights to light.

All the world's children have the right to life and to happiness. Their rights are indivisible and of primary importance. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." (*resolution 217 A (III)*). At this special session on children, it is our responsibility to put their rights at the top of our priorities by embracing their pain and their dreams of happiness.

More than 100 million children do not attend school, and more than half a billion children live on less than one dollar a day. They suffer the psychological consequences of that abject poverty the rest of their lives. The trauma of terrorism, violence and conflicts, of which children are victims, has the same effect. During the last decade, 2 million children were massacred, 6 million were injured or disabled, and 12 million were left homeless and abandoned. To eradicate such poverty and its destructive effects, we must promote a policy of openness and a new global

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partnership to help children. Children are anxious to change the world. In them we have an exceptional partner.

On their behalf, at this podium, the First Lady of the world's first black republic said "no" to HIV/AIDS. It is a shocking fact that 1.4 million children of the world under 15 years of age are seropositive. One recalls that 4.3 million children under the age of 15 have already died of AIDS since the beginning of the pandemic. A memorable number of demonstrations against AIDS have been organized by Haitians abroad. We give our special thanks to friends who have called for the lifting of economic sanctions against Haiti.

By forming ties of solidarity across national borders and by all uniting against corruption, drugs, impunity and poverty, we can reduce infant mortality rates and provide basic education for all.

On the eve of the bicentenary of our independence, we are pleased to have enacted a law prohibiting corporal punishment while we await the eradication of the practice of child domestic servitude in the country. Such developments will undoubtedly open new horizons in education for our children. *Homo doctus in se semper divitias habet*: A learned man always has riches in himself. In the school of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, President Mandela and Toussaint Louverture, our children will nourish themselves with dignity, the lifeblood of the economy of solidarity.

That dialectic approach, in which children contribute to their own growth and the growth of their world, requires that we listen constantly to children. Yes, we must always listen to children. In Haiti, we like to listen to our children, who since 1995 have had their own radio station, Radio Timoun, and their own television station, Télé Timoun. The more ears and hearts open to the children of the world, the more the rays of hope will guide our steps towards a better world — a better world in which the development of the countries of the South, far from slowing the growth of the North, will help to stimulate the global economy, as the reconstruction of Europe in 1945 demonstrated.

Our children dream of a better world. We believe in it too. We wish peace and happiness for the inhabitants of our planet, and great love for children of the world.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania.

President Meidani (*spoke in French*): Since the beginning of its period of democratic transition some 10 years ago, Albania has seen far-reaching reforms. Two of its top priorities continue to be the implementation and proper functioning of a legislative system and its relevant and effective mechanisms to ensure the respect and protection of human rights in Albania and the creation and proper functioning of the institution of the People's Advocate. Those initiatives are based on fundamental international texts such as the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the respect and protection of the rights of children and youth are an essential element.

There has been a certain amount of relatively significant success in improving the living conditions of children. The infant mortality rate has been reduced by half, and malnutrition in children under the age of 5 has been considerably reduced. Good results have been achieved in the field of health, such as through regularly administered vaccinations.

The Constitution of the Republic of Albania enshrines special State protection for children and young people. It guarantees free public education and the protection of children from violence and ill-treatment, and from abuse in the workplace, especially for those who have not yet reached the legal working age. Recently, the Government of Albania adopted and implemented its National Strategy for Children, an ambitious document that attempts to coordinate the activities of the State and other societal actors. In coming years, State policy must include more effective measures to improve health, education and living conditions. Such improvements are the direct result of the economic consolidation of our country, whose gross domestic product is growing at a rate of about 7 per cent per year. It is also due to a better distribution of State budgetary resources and to more intense cooperation with international agencies. Particular care will be taken to protect the environment, which has suffered severe damage in recent years. In tandem with child-care measures, the Government is striving to provide health care and treatment for mothers by creating the necessary facilities for maternity and subsequent care.

Children are encouraged to take advantage of a wealth of opportunities for information and education, the learning of foreign languages, decent treatment and leisure and sports activities, and are also encouraged to develop their talents and gifts; that is a clear-sighted task that Albanian society has dedicated itself to. Meanwhile, education programmes are currently being revised to meet European standards. Here, initiatives include the enrichment of education programmes with material on human rights and respect for the child's personality, on environmental protection and on civic and democratic education for life in family and in society.

However, our State is aware that acute problems still exist, especially those due to the democratic transition and to regional phenomena of crime and the trafficking of children and others from the most vulnerable sectors of society. Serious efforts have been for close regional cooperation in fighting those very harmful phenomena, especially the trafficking of human beings.

To solve such problems, the use and strengthening of legal and preventive mechanisms are not by themselves enough. As economic conditions improve, more and more direct individual contributions and the commitment of various sectors of civil society and of the business community can be observed. In this context, I would like to suggest a particular way of approaching the question of support, aid and social assistance for vulnerable and needy young people: they can be given the means with which to lead an independent, active life. In Albania, one business-oriented social project of this type is called the Youth Albanian Parcel Service. In that project, young people belonging to needy groups, such as orphans, the disabled and gypsies, are being encouraged, and are being provided with the necessary means, to start their own business: a courier service for businesses. A number of companies and political and other figures have voluntarily contributed to the project.

I would also like to draw attention to problems faced by children in some parts of the world. The greatest threats to children are poverty and war, which in most cases go hand in hand. We have all witnessed the tragedies visited on children by conflicts in their own country or between countries. Such were the tragic events of recent years in the former Yugoslavia, where a large number of children were among the many innocent victims. It will take a long time for the wounds of children in Kosovo and Bosnia, inflicted by blind and unprincipled war and by the policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Milosevic regime, to heal. We must not allow such events to recur anywhere in the world.

According to a recent report on child soldiers, some 300,000 children are currently being used as combatants in 34 conflicts. It would be a positive and extremely important move to create a new international monitoring organ or a United Nations tribunal to put an end to the practice of exploiting children as soldiers by exerting pressure on groups and Governments in order to expose the facts and to seek indictments and even convictions. A similar measure should be adopted to prevent sexual tourism, especially that in which children are the victims.

I believe that education is the key to a healthy and solid future for every child. A widespread effort to change the situation is clearly being made. In the communiqué issued at the G-8 summit held in Genoa, Italy, education was described as the main pillar of development and employment. That summit also achieved agreement on the creation of a working group on education in order to meet the Dakar objectives. I sincerely hope that this will make it possible successfully to undertake a global initiative for education. The real proof will be whether the G-8 can make a genuine financial contribution in order to provide all children with education, as it pledged to do in Okinawa.

In expressing my gratitude for having been able to speak at this forum, I take this opportunity to express the confidence and deep conviction of the Albanian people and of myself that, under the leadership of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the United Nations will play an increasingly important role in efforts to achieve human equality, peace, social progress and prosperity throughout the world.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Jorge Sampaio, President of the Portuguese Republic.

President Sampaio (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): I am particularly pleased to be taking part in this special session of the General Assembly on children, first because Portugal is proud of its committed stance on this problem and attributes great importance to promoting children's rights; secondly, because this

session marks an historic turning point in our approach to this problem, which will enable us to establish a real children's agenda for the twenty-first century; and lastly, because I personally believe that the subject of children is a core political priority that is decisive for each person's future as well as for the collective future of any society.

I would like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who was responsible for including this special session in the framework of the important conferences organized by the United Nations and who is the driving force behind the work done in favour of children's rights under the aegis of this Organization. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the members of Governments, representatives of civil society and young people from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe who helped prepare this special session. Their commitment raised the awareness of politicians the world over and played a vital role in establishing an international children's agenda and in building a world fit for children to live in.

On behalf of Portugal, I would also like to express our appreciation of and unconditional support for the United Nations Children's Fund, which has played a decisive part in defending children's rights.

This special session provides a unique opportunity to reaffirm our responsibility for the construction of a world in which the right to be a child and a young person is a universal reality without distinction or discrimination. It is also the right time, however, to assert children's and young people's right to citizenship, based both on an acknowledgement of their intrinsic individuality and vulnerability and on their capacity to participate in and influence decisions, thus contributing decisively to the progress of our societies. It is on behalf of that citizenship that the development of policies for children and young people that are specifically centred on their problems is increasingly urgent and, in my view, constitutes one of the main priorities of our Governments and of public authorities in general.

Twelve years have elapsed since the World Summit for Children, where the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its Plan of Action were adopted, and there has been significant progress in various sectors, particularly in health and education. In Portugal, for example, infant mortality has dropped drastically and there have been significant improvements in the health and education systems, while access to pre-school education has increased by about 20 per cent over the past five years.

This improvement in the life of children and in the protection of their rights over the past decade, clearly highlighted in the excellent report by the Secretary-General entitled "We the Children", is undoubtedly a positive and encouraging sign of the way ahead. It also irrefutably illustrates the decisive role played by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, in the practical and material improvement of the lives of children and young people.

Indeed, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a regulatory and ethical frame of reference that will inspire all actions on behalf of children. Until this Convention has been universally ratified, all international action on behalf of children will lack the appropriate foundations and its effectiveness will be seriously compromised. Now is the time to reaffirm the Convention's universal value and I appeal strongly for it to be widely ratified.

If the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a turning point and a landmark in the history of children as persons in their own right, we must now define a precise strategy to elaborate a specific agenda, consolidating the progress achieved in the past and facing the persisting difficulties with determination, while identifying all the new challenges.

Many of these challenges require our urgent intervention, including preventing early school drop-out, drug addiction and teenage pregnancy, and fighting poverty, violence and the ill-treatment and sexual abuse of children.

In this area too, globalization has introduced a new situation: the cross-cutting nature of many of the problems affecting children and young people today — the recurrence, both in time and in space, of conditions in which critical situations and difficulties are reproduced, including the globalization of violence, to which children and young people are particularly vulnerable. It is therefore urgent to combine our efforts and agree on a robust priority agenda for children and to ensure that it is accomplished rapidly and in a progressive manner. Children must be at the core of a policy based on a comprehensive vision of their particular characteristics and needs, a policy that is developed as an end in itself.

We have so far been content to develop partial policies to solve specific problems. But we still lack a comprehensive policy for children and young people based on a vision of society and on the particular needs of children, and determined by the challenges posed by the modern world. It must be granted the necessary political priority, because a society that does not take care of its children is a society without a future. Only joint and robust action through the solidarity of the international community will be able to overcome the difficult obstacles facing the development of children in a globalized world — obstacles that are compromising the social progress of our countries.

I am thinking particularly of the proliferation of armed conflicts and the growing and unacceptable victimization and use of children in those conflicts, the devastating effects of AIDS on young people and children — mainly the socially and economically deprived — and the growing marginalization and social exclusion of more vulnerable groups, including migrants, women and children. This is why we believe that protecting children and adopting public policies to ensure their rights, including their right to education — which in my view is a vital and decisive priority — are not only ethical and normative imperatives but also the only way to build a more just, unified society, to guarantee economic development and to strengthen democracy and a sense of citizenship.

The defence of children's rights is a fundamental aspect of Portugal's foreign policy within the framework of international cooperation, in particular within our closest family — the European Union — but also within the United Nations and, naturally, in the context of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and the Ibero-American Community of Nations, of which Portugal is a committed member. Our presence at this special session attests to our firm determination to continue to contribute actively to the universal achievement of the rights of children both at home and internationally.

That is why we are pleased to highlight the participation of children and young people from all over the world, including Portugal, at this summit. As we see it, the participation of these young people has a symbolic element, but it is more than just a symbolic gesture: it expresses the solemn acknowledgement that children and young people are citizens and active participants in building our societies.

I will conclude by addressing a very special word to the children taking part in this special session. They are the true objects of our labours and concerns. I want them to understand that, each day, our destiny is played out in an effort to give our children and our young people a more suitable world. I also want them to know that I will do everything possible to build a world for the children of people who were themselves never children, as the Portuguese writer Soeiro Pereira Gomes so eloquently put it.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency The Honourable Sandra Sumang Pierantozzi, Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau.

Ms. Pierantozzi (Palau): It is a great honour for me to represent the Republic of Palau and all the people of Palau, especially its children, before the General Assembly. I join speakers who have spoken before me in thanking the United Nations for making this special session on children possible. I thank the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children and all the other agencies and non-governmental organizations that work tirelessly on behalf of the children of the world. I thank them and congratulate them on a job well done. The 2001 UNICEF annual report gives a great summary of the accomplishments during the period 1990 to 2000, UNICEF's "Decade of action".

In my own small island country of Palau we have some accomplishments that we are proud to share. We ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995, and in 1998 we submitted our first report on its implementation to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. We were invited last year by the Committee to discuss our report with them. Some of the accomplishments we highlighted in the report include the fact that over 95 per cent of all two-year-old children have been immunized against childhood vaccine-preventable diseases, the fact that universal education has been guaranteed through legislation and that our infant mortality rate is below 15 per thousand. There is universal access to health care and potable water in our country. We are currently working hard to make our only hospital a UNICEF/World Health Organization-certified baby-friendly hospital to promote breastfeeding in our country. We anticipate an external assessment by mid year.

While we are encouraged by these accomplishments, we still have much work to do, not only to protect children's rights but also to ensure that their childhood is healthy, fun and appreciated. We subscribe fully to the Yanuca Island Declaration on healthy islands, adopted by Pacific island ministers and secretaries of health in Fiji in 1995 as their vision for the twenty-first century. The first characteristic of healthy islands is that they must be a place where children are nourished in body and in mind. In Palau we have added the soul to that characteristic of healthy islands.

Although there is universal access to health care in my country, full and needed medical care is not always available to our children. To help ensure the good health of our children, we have reached out to our neighbouring Taiwan, Republic of China, for some needed medical care. At this very moment, even as I speak, at least two of our children with cleft-lip palates are being given special surgical treatment at one of the fine hospitals in Taiwan, at no cost to them or to their families.

I wish I could continue to say that all is well in our islands. I am afraid that I cannot. Let me just mention a few reasons I say that not all is well in the islands. We have truancy and school drop-outs. We have teen-age pregnancies out of wedlock. We have problems with drug use in schools. And we are seeing among our children increasing signs of disrespect for parents and elders. Indeed, we are concerned.

The annual national women's conference in Palau, which took place during the first week of April this year, had the theme "Caring for and nurturing our children". At that conference, the person who spoke on the rights of the child expounded on the use of tobacco as a form of exploitation, as referred to in article 36 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That article states that a child has the right to protection from "all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare" (*resolution 44/25, annex*).

Our youth tobacco survey indicates that 54 per cent of elementary school students and 68 per cent of high school students currently chew betel nut with tobacco. It also shows that 18 per cent of elementary school students and 23 per cent of high school students currently smoke cigarettes. I wonder what the rates of tobacco use are among the children of other Member States' respective countries.

We watch BBC World and CNN, and our hearts go out to the children whose lives are devastated by armed conflicts, poverty and hunger. So many children have so few opportunities for a healthy life. And yet many of us watch — sometimes with a lack of interest, sometimes with disdain — as our children use tobacco daily, sometimes even around us, and we do nothing about it. We cry foul when children are exploited sexually or in the labour arena. Yet the tobacco industry knows that nicotine is addictive, and it has targeted our children to exploit their sense of adventure and their desire for glamour, power, speed and what have you, and we do little, if anything, to stop such exploitation of our children.

We may not be able to do much for children in areas of armed conflict or for children who live in poverty, but we can do much for the many children who have great potential for good health but who stand to lose that potential through their addiction to nicotine, because they have been quietly exploited right under our noses. We can support the strong framework convention on tobacco control that is currently being negotiated — that is within our power. My country has been advocating a strong convention during those negotiations. I challenge other countries to do the same on behalf of all our children. They have a right to be protected, and we have an obligation to protect them. We could make it one of the greatest achievements for children in this decade of renewal of commitment and future action.

In conclusion, I should like to add that my country is committed to doing its part to make the world a place fit for children. I should like to acknowledge the great work that UNICEF's Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific has done and is doing for Pacific children. And, on behalf of the children of Palau, I want to thank all participants for their combined efforts in favour of our children.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Attiya Inayatullah, Minister for Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education of Pakistan.

Ms. Inayatullah (Pakistan): Pakistan is a child-friendly nation; its ownership rests with 50 million children, with a vibrant civil society and with a child-emphasizing Government. On behalf of our delegation, which has all-stakeholder representation, I should like to express how immensely pleased we are to see you,

Sir, presiding over this special session. You bring to your office the traditional warmth and legendary wisdom of the East and the vision of a forward-looking nation. We are confident that, under your able stewardship, this special session will achieve its objectives. In that, you have our full support and cooperation.

We bring to this session the personal greetings of President Pervez Musharraf for its success. Understandably, the post-11-September rescheduling of the President's earlier planned participation fell through the cracks, on the one hand because of the unprecedented carnage that afflicted Manhattan and the rest of the Eastern seaboard of the United States and, on the other, because of the turbulence that erupted in our own region. President Musharraf was between a rock and a hard place. Our decision was taken in the national interest and with a view to Pakistan's quest for global peace, particularly in nuclearized South Asia. Pakistan reiterates that it stands firm against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We condemn the dastardly crimes perpetrated against humanity that have left many thousands of children traumatized as the result of the loss of their parents or other loved ones. We share the anguish and the grief of the bereaved. May the souls of the departed rest in peace.

Pakistan's belief in and support for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is of long standing. As anecdotal evidence of that, many decades ago, when the existence of UNICEF was being seriously questioned, it was Pakistan's representative to the United Nations who convincingly pleaded on behalf of the world's children and won a great moral victory whereby, on 1 December 1950, the General Assembly gave its blessing to UNICEF. Eyewitnesses say it was an unforgettable day. Our confidence in the then-nascent organization and in its mandate was very well placed. UNICEF's operations today do us proud. We wish to acknowledge Carol Bellamy and her team for transforming the nightmare of the hideous acts of 11 September into the dream come true of a special session.

Pakistan also has the proud distinction of being one of the six initiator countries that issued the first call for children. The response to that call was indeed momentous. The World Summit for Children, held in 1990, was an unprecedented success. It is therefore only natural that, a decade later, we should take stock of what has been achieved, of where we have fallen short, and of what should be done to complete our unfinished agenda.

That monumental task has been addressed by the Preparatory Committee. After much sweat and toil, the draft outcome document, "A World Fit for Children" (A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3), does the Chairperson, Miss Patricia Durrant, and her Bureau proud. It could not have been achieved had they not viewed it as a labour of love. We applaud it as a forward-looking, focused and result-oriented document. We endorse the greater attention given to children who require special protection, such as exploited and abused children — particularly the victims of trafficking and child prostitution, which continue to torture the collective conscience of humanity; the many children afflicted by armed conflicts, which relentlessly kill, maim and displace millions of children; and those affected by HIV/AIDS, which alone has orphaned some 13 million children.

We need not search very hard for our failure to redeem the pledges made 10 years ago in this very building. Abject poverty, economic deprivation, social exclusion and exploitation are writ large as the impediments that frustrate our aspirations for the world's children. The situation, however, is not irredeemable. The past decade, besides bringing forth new challenges, has ushered in unique opportunities made possible by globalization. A world fit for children has painstakingly carved out our shared agenda. World leaders unanimously endorsed that approach in this Hall during the Millennium Summit.

It is but stating the obvious that our aspirations will remain a pipe dream until and unless the developed world, international donor agencies and financial institutions assist developing countries through debt relief measures, increased development assistance, enhanced investments, the removal of trade barriers and measures to bridge the digital divide.

Do we have the political will for a concerted, global approach to global challenges? The answer cannot but be in the affirmative, because we must safeguard our children and because there can be no excuse for not caring for our children. Above all, as Gabriela Mistral, the Nobel Prize winner, said "Many things we need can wait. The child cannot".

We in Pakistan acknowledge that the worst victims of the twenty-first century are the children of families trapped in poverty. President Pervez

Musharraf's Government is working on good governance, the restoration of democracy and an economic revival which regulates foreign borrowing to shed dependency on external creditors. Concurrently, Pakistan is putting in place a comprehensive reform programme which protects the vulnerable, including children, who are a fundamental element in Pakistan's human security agenda.

Pakistan's approach is that children's issues come under the purview of human rights and human development. In our national perspective plan, we have concentrated on four areas: primary education, infant mortality, the elimination of child labour by 2005, and the endorsement of international instruments.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child has today blossomed into a national movement for children involving Government, civil society, media and, most important, children themselves. The Government of General Pervez Musharraf has also initiated measures to eliminate completely child labour by 2005. Pakistan took a significant step by ratifying Convention 182 of the International Labour Organization. We have also signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pakistan is now a proud signatory of all child-related treaties.

This kaleidoscopic view is necessary due to time constraints. A more detailed text will be distributed. It refers to a catalogue of initiatives which we seek to take in Pakistan to make it a world fit for children.

I would like to leave the young leaders — who are important stakeholders in this meeting — with a few thoughts. First, they must remember that lost time is never found again. Secondly, people are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges. Thirdly, keep your light shining; God will put it where it can be seen.

We shall return home wiser, and firmer in our conviction that depriving children, be it of their freedom, growth or education, in truth deprives nations of their sense of morality. It is in that spirit that we join the global voice in its call for a qualitative change in the lives of our children. Together we can make this world fit for children.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Miss Salma Abduljabar, Secretary of Social Affairs of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Miss Abduljabar (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): More than a decade ago, a major summit devoted to children was convened at United Nations Headquarters with the participation of heads of State or Government. During that World Summit for Children, heads of State or Government discussed frankly and honestly their responsibilities towards children. They promised that they would place children's interests above all other concerns. At the end of that important event, they agreed on specific goals, all of which were related to the survival, health, nutrition, education and protection of children.

There is no doubt that members of the international community have, according to their ability, taken many steps to improve the conditions of children. The majority of States have put in place national plans. Civil society organizations have played an effective role in many areas: identifying obstacles to the realization of the rights of the child, introducing proposals aimed at changing existing negative stereotypes and patterns, and drawing attention to the dangers that threaten the well-being of children, in particular that of children living in dire conditions that threaten their lives, health and physical and mental development.

We must confess that despite all the attention given to children in official statements, the achievements have not measured up to all our hopes and aspirations. There is still a wide gap between official commitments and achievements on the ground. The exploitation of children and the violation of their rights are still manifest, in the form of violence, exploitation, physical and psychological abuse and the lack of basic services and necessities. More than other groups in society, children are still exposed to the destructive impact of wars, conflicts and economic sanctions, among other dangers of modern society.

What we are witnessing on a daily basis in occupied Palestine is clear evidence of such dangers. There, the Israeli occupying forces deliberately kill children, deny the injured access to urgent humanitarian assistance such as food and medicine, destroy civil infrastructures, demolish homes while their inhabitants are still inside, detain and torture children and kill their parents and guardians in front of them, all in flagrant violation of the principles of international humanitarian law and human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. We call on the

international community to shoulder its responsibility to stop the crimes against Palestinian children, recognizing that the rights of the children of the world are indivisible. Confronted with such violations of the rights of the child, there is an urgent need for a serious, comprehensive new plan of action for the universal protection of children's rights and the principles of human rights.

With much pride, we can say that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is making remarkable progress in the protection and development of children. Those achievements are inspired by the principles of our revolution, which articulate a social philosophy aimed at achieving human welfare and happiness. They were also inspired by the Green Book, chapter III of which established important principles in child-rearing, including the following: that a child is a graduate of the mother's school; that a child's natural protection can be provided only by the umbrella of motherhood; and that the family is both the child's cradle and its social umbrella. Furthermore, we are guided by the Great Green Charter of Human Rights in the Era of the Masses, which stipulates that the society of the masses must ensure the care of both mother and child. It also declares that depriving children of their mothers, or mothers of their children, is an unjust and coercive act. Moreover, the Great Green Charter emphasizes that it is a sacred human right for a child to be raised in a united family, as are the enjoyment of motherhood and natural breastfeeding. Equally sacred is the natural right of every human being to learning and knowledge.

Those guidelines and principles have been embodied in our legislation. The penal code provides the necessary protection for embryos. Articles 390 and 395 of the penal code prohibit abortion. Article 373 of the code imposes severe punishment for crimes such as killing an illegitimate child on the grounds of defending a woman's honour. Current legislation also provides for suitable working conditions for pregnant women and for post-natal care for women in order to safeguard the child's right to life.

Furthermore, in application of the axiom that "the JAY Society is the guardian of those who have no guardians", our Basic Salary Law provides for the payment of a mont' ly grant to some categories and segments of the population, including children. Law No. 13 of 1980 guarantees shelter, health care and education for vulnerable groups with no means of income. Our legislation, including Law No. 95 of 1975, mandates free, compulsory primary education for all children, girls and boys. Any parent who prevents his or her children from going to school is subject to punishment by law.

We in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya have implemented a concrete plan of action for the development of the educational system that responds to contemporary priorities by exploiting advances in information and communication technologies to insure our full participation and involvement in the new millennium.

We have many laws that protect children against various forms of discrimination. Under the Constitutional Declaration of 1969, all Libyans are equal before the law. Law No. 20 of 1991, concerning the reinforcement of freedom, stipulates that all Libyan citizens, male and female, are free and enjoy equal rights. Libyan legislation and laws currently in force guarantee the right of children to free expression, thought, invention and creativity. There is no law or social restriction in Libya prohibiting girls from choosing any educational or vocational field. Hundreds of women are enrolled in various fields of specialization and in the police force and the army.

Law No. 5 of 1997 criminalizes the abuse of children. Article 398 of the Penal Code makes child abuse by battery, torture or infliction of any harm an offence punishable by imprisonment. Moreover, we have made considerable progress in the field of children's health. The rate of coverage for all required vaccinations has reached 100 per cent. Several diseases, such as polio, have been eradicated. Statistics derived from the Arab Libyan Survey of Mother and Child Health for 1995-2000 indicate that the rate of malnutrition in Libya is lower than in other countries of the region. The rate of malnourished children was only 4.7 per cent in the period covered. The rate of extremely underweight children does not exceed 2.7 per cent.

Libya was among the first States that signed and ratified, without any reservation, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In implementation of the provisions of that Convention, we have formed the national Higher Committee for Childhood and are submitting the required national reports. We were also among the first countries in Africa to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Libya is also a party to International Labour Organization

Convention No. 182 on the eradication of the worst forms of child labour and our laws prohibit the employment of children under the age of 15. At the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, my country signed the International Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, along with its three Protocols: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. The competent authorities in Libya are also studying the two Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the involvement of children in armed conflict and child trafficking and prostitution, with a view to accession.

As we highlight our achievements in the area of child survival, development and protection, this Assembly should be aware of the fact that Libyan children have suffered terribly, hundreds of them dying in road accidents, because of the embargo on air travel imposed on our country as a part of the unjust sanctions forced upon us for over seven years. Many Libyan children have also lost their lives and many others continue to be injured by the explosion of landmines planted during the Second World War by the colonial Powers. Some children have lost limbs to exploding mines while tending to their sheep or playing around their tents. Three years ago, 400 Libyan families suffered a devastating tragedy. Their children, two months to fourteen years of age, were deliberately injected with the AIDS virus, leading to the death of many. The case is being adjudicated by the Libyan courts, which will impartially and equitably determine the identities of the perpetrators and instigators of this hideous crime and the evil motives behind their act.

We welcome the convening of this session, as it provides us with the opportunity to review achievements at the national and international levels for the protection of children. It also avails us of an historical opportunity to reaffirm our commitments and to devise new plans to ensure a brighter future for our children. We believe that the most important priority of any such plans should be the provision of primary health care and the essential and appropriate health facilities. It is totally unacceptable that 10 million children die annually of diseases that can be protected against by preventive measures, the raising of awareness and the provision of affordable medicines. Measures proven to be effective in combating malnutrition and the eradication of diseases such as AIDS must be intensified through the establishment of centres for prevention and treatment and the provision of more effective and less costly medicines and drugs. Special assistance should also be given to AIDS orphans.

Furthermore, specific time-bound strategies should be drafted to facilitate school enrolment for children, whose numbers currently exceed 100 million, a majority of them girls. In these two fields, we call for top priority to be given to the African continent, where the number of children not enrolled in schools constitutes 40 per cent of unenrolled children worldwide and where 3.5 million are underweight at birth. The percentage of HIV-infected persons in the continent is 70 per cent of the world rate of infection, while 90 per cent of AIDS orphans live in Africa.

We in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, on the basis of our belief in defending the right of African children and adults to health and well-being, declared in a statement made by the Leader of the Revolution at last year's Abuja summit the establishment of the African Research Centre for Disease Control. The largest share of its costs will be shouldered by Libya in an effort to move conscientious people to contribute to the success of that institution or to emulate its example, so that efforts may be united in waging humankind's battle against fatal disease.

Assistance and resources must also be provided to countries affected by mines and other war relics to which innocent children fall victim. We stress that no plan or programme can be successful without resources. To ensure healthy life, quality education and the protection of children from disease, it is therefore necessary to provide adequate resources at both the national and the international levels. In this respect, we call for the allocation in national budgets of more resources for children. International financial institutions should also give priority to expenditure on child protection programmes in the resources they apportion to development. We stress, furthermore, the importance of an expeditious solution to the predicament of external debt that burdens certain countries and obstructs their efforts to protect children and sustain their growth. We also call for the implementation of policies exempting the exports of the developing and least developed countries from

customs duties and the quota system in order to support those countries' efforts to implement plans of action for the benefit of children.

Finally, we are aware of the fact that there are many issues that deserve priority. However, nothing could be more vital than the survival of our children. Let us therefore grant this issue utmost priority. Children are the pillars of the future and the axis of progress for all societies, at all times and everywhere.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to remind participants once again that statements in the debate in plenary meeting are limited to 5 minutes. I would also like to inform the Assembly that, for this morning alone, we have 33 speakers on the list. I thank members in advance for their cooperation.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Léon Alfred Opimbat, Minister for Health, Solidarity and Humanitarian Action of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Opimbat (Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): The future of children is today at the centre of our vision of the world. The international community must champion and encourage that most important investment: investment in the child. That is why the delegation of the Congo, headed by Mrs. Antoinette Sassou Nguesso, wife of our head of State, extends its warmest and most heartfelt congratulations to the United Nations and to Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the successful organization of this world gathering for children.

The outstanding draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children", is refocusing our concerns about children as parents and leaders at all levels. It is children who, throughout history, have been the best symbol of human life. We must therefore make that document a reality. The debate over points on which there are differences of opinion, which has taken place throughout its consideration, should certainly not be our greatest concern. We need instead to mobilize to provide domestic, regional and international consistency in the effective implementation of the new plan of action.

Owing to a lack of coherence in the approach towards development, developing countries, particularly those in Africa, are experiencing difficulties in attaining the goals set out in both the 1990 Plan of Action and in the Millennium Declaration of 2000. A sustained partnership on the national, regional and international levels is therefore needed for the implementation of objectives to promote the survival, protection and development of children.

Without a doubt, the issue of the future of children occupies a fundamental place in our discussions, whether those discussions have to do with peace and security, development, health, the fight against poverty or protecting the environment. That is clearly the reason why the international community has mobilized in Latin American and the Caribbean, in Asia and the Pacific, in Europe and in Africa — in a word, throughout the world — to consider the future of children.

Despite mixed results in meeting the commitments undertaken in 1990, due to both internal and external factors, my country, Congo-Brazzaville, has undertaken to establish a legal mechanism for children. The Congo has also acceded to and ratified the major regional and international legal instruments regarding children. Therefore, while braving adversity during a time of austerity, Congo has been able to adapt its goals to the pressing needs of our times.

It is now high time — indeed, it is urgent — for regional integration to take place; for illicit trafficking in weapons to cease, as children are often the first to pay the price for our abuses in the increasing number of conflicts; and for the necessary resources to be mobilized to cope with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and related illnesses, for in this area children are, once again, the primary victims.

The stakes are high: as has often been recognized, the future of mankind depends upon what we do today for children. The Congo is fully aware of this. Moreover, it is in order to honour its commitments to children that the wife of the head of State provided very strong impetus within the framework of the preparatory process for this special session through her personal participation at all relevant regional and subregional summits for first ladies. That is also the reason why 22 per cent of the Congo's population said "yes for children" in the course of the United Nations appeal.

Allow me, on behalf of the President of the Republic of the Congo, Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, to express our gratitude to all our bilateral and multilateral partners and to the non-governmental organizations that have tirelessly provided their

multifaceted assistance for the reintegration and demobilization of over 25,000 former militia members and for completing the collection of approximately 11,000 weapons along with ammunition — in a word, for the reconstruction of the Congo.

As we can see, the future of children will continue to be endangered if the States of the world do not collectively carry out the task of emancipating children. Let us therefore, in a spirit of peace and harmony, opt together for a future worthy of children. Let us continue forever to say in unison that children come first.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Fahad Salem Al-Shagra, Minister for Education of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Shagra (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have had the honour and pleasure of being mandated by President Saddam Hussein to represent my country, Iraq, at this special session of the General Assembly devoted to children, which has been convened to discuss one of the most serious of all topics, namely, the suffering and the needs of children.

At the outset, I wish to point out that I myself and other members of my delegation — which includes Iraqi children, mothers and representatives of non-governmental organizations concerned with the child — were prevented from attending all the meetings of this session, as we were given entry visas only the day before yesterday. Our children could therefore not join the other children of the world in their activities. Through such behaviour, the United States of America aims to prevent the children of Iraq living under an embargo from screaming out loud in agony and pain before all the honourable and decent people of the world attending this session, and from exposing the crimes being committed against them by the United States of America.

At the beginning of the 1990s the children of Iraq began to confront a humanitarian catastrophe unequalled in history. What makes the situation more disastrous and horrendous is the fact that it is a man-made disaster created by those who claim scientific and technological supremacy and who pride themselves on the protection and defence of human rights. That catastrophe results from the imposition of a comprehensive and unjust sanctions regime by the United States of America and the United Kingdom in the name of the United Nations, while the Governments of the world remain silent.

This catastrophe has caused destruction among the most vulnerable groups of Iraqi society: women, children and the elderly, who have been deprived of their most basic human rights to food and medicine and who have been denied the right to enjoy life, growth, happiness and dignity.

In that regard, I cannot fail to mention the 1 million children who have died — half a million of whom were under 5 years old — at the rate of 9,000 a month. That is, a child dies every five minutes, which means that 900 children under 5 years old will die during this session. What is particularly heart-wrenching is that those children are dying slow and agonizing deaths as a result of a variety of ailments and an acute shortage of medicine and medical treatment.

In addition, Iraq's children, and all of its people, are victims of the crime of the century, committed by the "protectors of humanity" through their use of depleted uranium in more than 950,000 bombs targeting Iraq. The horrific consequences of this bombing have surpassed what happened in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. So I wonder how we in Iraq can implement paragraph 36 of the draft outcome document (A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3), which calls for a reduction in the infant and under-five mortality rate by at least one third and a reduction in the maternal mortality ratio by at least one third?

A quick review of the end-decade review (A/S-27/3) submitted by the Secretary-General shows that it agrees with our approach. Let me read from some of the embarrassingly written paragraphs:

> "Perhaps more children have suffered from armed conflicts and violence since the Summit than at any comparable period in history." (*para. 28*)
>
> "... armed conflicts and other forms of violence posed major challenges to the rights and development of children." (*para. 72*)
>
> "Conflicts not only killed more than two million children in the past decade but they also left many other millions disabled and psychologically scarred by experiences of terror." (*para. 73*)

The authors of those paragraphs may be objective, but they lack the courage to call things by their proper names.

Therefore, on this occasion, we are called upon to denounce the policy of violence against the children of Iraq and Palestine and to condemn all types of sanctions imposed on children in the Arab nation and around the world. Those statements must be contained in a separate paragraph — otherwise, this session's decisions and recommendations will be like those described in paragraph 11 of the report:

> "It is often said that in many United Nations conferences, goals are ever set but never met, and that commitments on paper are rarely translated into action on the ground."

Iraq's children have felt the scourge of war, pain, hunger and illness. Their suffering continues, with little or no relief from the international community. How, then, can we be expected to welcome programmes designed by the same people who are keeping our children ill and hungry? How can we explain to Iraq's children that the United Nations agencies are offering to help heal the wounds inflicted by the United Nations itself?

We should like to remind the Presidents and representatives of countries around the world participating in this special session that the Iraqi children who suffer today will lead Iraq tomorrow. It will be difficult for those who endured hunger, pain, a deprived childhood and an adolescence lost in frustration to forget who imposed the embargo and who is participating in its continuation. Is that acceptable to this session? How many more children will have to be killed by the United States and the United Kingdom before something is done to end the sanctions? On the other hand, one might agree with what Mrs. Albright, former Secretary of State of the United States, said when the CBS television network asked her, "We have heard that half a million children died. I mean, that's more than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?" Her answer was, "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it."

I am confident that Iraq's children will never forget the honourable positions taken by heads of State of countries that have fully recognized the disaster and have stood with them. They hope that the Presidents of those nations will reaffirm their stand by calling for the adoption of an unambiguous decision to end the embargo against Iraq's children and for a commitment to implement that decision.

I wish this special session every success in adopting and implementing its resolutions and recommendations in fulfilment of our great expectations.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Al-Rasheed, Minister of Education of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Rasheed (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): More than a decade after the convening of the World Summit for Children, and after the adoption of the widely supported international Convention on the Rights of the Child, we return today, as leaders and officials, to renew our commitment to a better future for every child and to discuss, at this critical historical juncture, what has been achieved on behalf of children at the national, regional and international levels, as well as what we must still do to ensure a brighter future for our children.

We in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia do not view the establishment of children's rights as an accomplishment on which to rest. We believe that children's rights are a responsibility of parents, society and the State — a responsibility for which those entities are to be held accountable. Therefore, the child-parent and the child-society relationships are not limited to their material, contractual dimension, based on mutual benefits and interests, but are founded on belief, values and reason. Such relationships should be governed by love and compassion.

A child's first right is to be born within the context of a legitimate marriage. That is a prenatal right that Islam guarantees by outlawing sexual relationships outside marriage. The family is built on a legitimate marriage, which is the primary unit in the building of human society, and the nucleus and the pillar of the society in which a child is born, nurtured and fed.

Clause 10 of the Basic Law of Governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia states, that "The State is determined to strengthen family bonds and to protect the Arabic and Islamic values of the Saudi family, to protect its members and to provide suitable means for the development of their talents and abilities".

A child's right to be born, to survive and to grow, as ascertained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, starts at the moment when he is imbued with a soul in his mother's womb, according to Islamic Sharia law. His life is God's gift, and his right to live is God's prerogative, which cannot be usurped by abortion. Abortion is premeditated murder, so it cannot be used as a means of birth control or family planning, and it should not be considered except when a mother's life is endangered.

Therefore, our laws guarantee certain rights to pregnant women, including the right to prenatal care. A pregnant worker is entitled to maternity leave one month prior to the birth of her child and six weeks thereafter. She is also entitled to additional leave for recovery and breastfeeding, in addition to the regular vacation to which she and her colleagues are entitled. Employers must bear the cost of medical check-ups, of treatment and of birth expenses, and they cannot fire a female worker while she is on maternity leave.

Based on Islamic precepts, Saudi law guarantees a child's inheritance rights even before birth. Thus, if the husband of a pregnant woman should die, his property cannot be distributed until the child is born, which ensures not only the pregnant woman's peace of mind but also the right of her unborn child to his or her fair share of the inheritance.

In Saudi Arabia, we consider children to be the nucleus and the focus of our country's socio-economic development. Accordingly, all resources have been mobilized to allow every child to enjoy his or her basic rights. Government and private organizations play a major role in providing educational, medical, social, recreational and developmental services to all children. National development plans have consistently included child-oriented projects and programmes whose objective is to provide total support to children. A national childhood commission has been established to coordinate all efforts in the field of childhood services, to develop those services and to encourage all projects and programmes that serve children and guarantee their rights.

We believe that responsibility towards a child is a religious and legal duty of the parents, first and foremost. If they die, that responsibility is passed on to relatives. If there are no relatives, society, as represented by the State and relevant organizations, must bear that responsibility by providing food, accommodation and clothing, protecting the child's physical and mental health, and ensuring his or her upbringing and education.

Relevant Saudi governmental agencies endeavour to find custodial families for orphaned and abandoned children. This type of alternative custody includes schooling, the provision of educational materials to child centres and the encouragement of sports, library visits and children's theatrical activities. It also provides for the production of cultural materials, publications, shows and other programmes, as well as for guidance and counselling services for children who have delinquency problems. Vocational training is provided to children with special needs, and assistance is provided to families with disabled children who are unable to work.

Saudi Arabia has made free education available to all groups of children, including those with special needs, at appropriate educational institutions. Elementary schooling in Saudi Arabia has become a necessary foundation for all children. We have designed school curricula to achieve social and cultural development for children with the aim of encouraging them to become life-long readers and seekers of knowledge.

Under the umbrella of children's rights, some would claim that humans are the centre of the universe and that the satisfaction of their needs is the ultimate goal in life. We disagree with that view because it runs counter to our Islamic belief that God Almighty created man and gave him custody of the Earth for the purpose of developing it and establishing justice and fairness. Thus, man cannot deviate from the laws that his Creator set for him, because they were made for his transient benefit in life, as well as for his permanent happiness in the afterlife. We believe that it is wrong to circumvent or marginalize religion or to deviate from it by demanding total freedom or considering the satisfaction of physical needs and desires to be the measure of progress. That, we believe, leads to chaos and endangers society's security and safety, as well as the moral values that differentiate us from other creatures.

We live in an era in which interests, benefits, cultures and values are interconnected as never before and in which the various cultures of the world have to share one Earth. We therefore look forward to a century characterized by peace, constructive cooperation and

brotherhood, founded on values, principles, mutual respect and equality. That necessitates upholding international agreements and conventions in an atmosphere of respect for the sovereignty of States and for the national, religious, cultural and historical specificity of every society. The world has been ravaged by disasters, disputes and wars in which the innocent have been the victims: the old, the young, women and children. And we see no refuge for humanity from these calamities except by upholding human values and the divine laws which protect man's dignity and legitimate rights and by countering the misguided concepts that have led to the break-up of families and the disintegration of societies. That is how we can uphold God's laws, achieve our commitments to family and society and, thus, build a happy, secure life in which our children can grow, learn, give and be creative.

While we meet here today to renew our commitment to building a better future for the world's children, we watch in horror at our television screens what is happening to the children of Palestine. They are not only being denied their childhood; they are being denied life itself. Their homes are destroyed, their bodies mutilated, their parents murdered, and their sense of nationhood confiscated. We and most other civilized nations demand withdrawal from the occupied territories; we demand that the Palestinian people be granted the right to live in their own independent State and that everyone be allowed to live in peace, justice and equality. Only then will the cloud of violence disappear and the region live in peace and amity. To protect the Palestinian children, we might take all measures necessary to guarantee their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

May God bless the Assembly and may God bless all the children of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, Minister for National Unity and Social Development of Malaysia.

Mrs. Sulaiman (Malaysia): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's profound thanks and appreciation to the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), and in particular to Ms. Carol Bellamy, for the outstanding work carried out by UNICEF all over the world. Let me also express our gratitude to Ambassador Patricia Durrant for her work in preparing the special session.

Nation-States are like family systems: they are measured by their economic status, the splendour of their form and other physical attributes — not excluding the human face or the soul of the living body. And yet, it seems that the desired balance of the human state has since been much eroded and embattled, and its issues remain unresolved. A decade ago, the walls of the Assembly Hall echoed with the proclamation that "There can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future" (*A/45/625, annex, part I, para. 25*). We promised then to protect children, to diminish their suffering, to promote the fullest development of their human potential and to make them aware of their needs, their rights and their opportunities. Unfortunately, more than 10 years later, the reports of our children at the special session are testimony that some of the goals we had set out earlier are still unfulfilled.

Many developing countries are apprehensive about globalization because the globalization that we embrace has not been able to solve our fundamental problems and, if we are not careful, will further worsen the situation of children's issues. In developing countries, chronic poverty remains the greatest obstacle to fulfilling development goals for children. Despite a $30 trillion global economy, some 40 per cent of children in developing countries are surviving on less than $1 a day, forcing millions of them to engage in some form of labour. Millions of children are malnourished. Nearly 120 million still do not attend school — 55 per cent of them girls. Almost 11 million children die each year before their fifth birthday, and children's lives are increasingly at risk because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Children are the most helpless victims of conflict. The waves of violence that have swept across the world in recent years have displaced an enormous number of people, most of whom are innocent women and children. Political and civil upheavals tear many countries apart. There has been an increased use of children as combatants and as pawns in the deadly game of warfare played and orchestrated, sadly, by adults. Hundreds and thousands of children have been forced to take part in armed conflict as soldiers, sex slaves or porters. Countless children, including girls of a very tender age, have been scarred psychologically by the violence, exploitation and trauma they have undergone.

The plight of Palestinian children and children under foreign occupation remains a deplorable state of affairs as we fail to find any solution, political or otherwise, to the problem of the Middle East. The other area of concern to my delegation is the devastating effect of sanctions on children. We therefore urge that all future sanctions — if they need be invoked at all as a necessary measure of last resort — be imposed only after an in-depth and careful study of their potential impact on civilians, especially children, has been carried out.

This special session is indeed an opportune moment for us to learn from the lessons, shortcomings, mistakes and failures of the past so that we may strive to reach the remaining Summit goals and to respond to the call of the Millennium Declaration. Malaysia is fortunate to have been blessed with the resources and to have acquired the necessary skills and experience to achieve notable levels of success. Malaysia's multi-ethnic society has gone through the process of laying down the basic building blocks of social development and national unity strategies, which in essence became the cornerstone of our short- and long-term 20-year National Vision Policy inspired by our Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Mr. Mahathir Mohamad.

Malaysia has made significant progress since the 1990 Summit. The first National Plan of Action for Children in the 1990s addressed the issues of the survival and protection of Malaysian children. We achieved fully 11 out of the 13 objectives of the Plan. As a follow-up to this, the second National Plan of Action for Children, covering the years 2001 to 2020, better known in its abbreviated form as the NPA 2020, will focus on the issues of the development and participation of children in Malaysia in anticipation of the full-fledged process of globalization. Malaysia made good on the promise we made in Beijing to form a National Advisory and Consultative Council on Children in Malaysia, just as we made good on our commitment to bringing 12 of our children from Malaysia to this special session today. The Advisory Council I referred to earlier has the role of facilitating, evaluating, monitoring and implementing the National Plan.

Let not the hopes of our children present and participating here today be dashed by our inactiveness and lack of seriousness. The United Nations has always been perceived in lofty ideals, particularly by children, as a beacon of hope and a repository of justice to the dispossessed and underprivileged. The final outcome document to be adopted at the end of this session, I am certain, will reinvigorate our firm commitment, through present and future initiatives, to global peace and security for all generations to come across cultures, religions and ethnicities. Let us not disappoint our young ones and move beyond pronouncements to affirmative and effective action. To that end, we must galvanize the necessary resources in a timely manner.

As a mother, a member of society and a policy maker, I stand humbly before this Assembly to appeal on behalf of our children all over the world. Let us responsibly rise to address this moral challenge for the sake of our children and our children's children. All of us here touch the future through our children — I know we will not let our children down. With all our voices, our actions and our will, let us together reject violence, discrimination and abuse; let us uphold fairness and justice; let us teach our children the cardinal virtues of courage, honour and strength of spirit that we have fostered through our brotherhood of nations. I recall the words of one literacy scholar who said:

> "Even as we speak the bones of our little ones are forming; their blood is coursing through their veins; their hearts are beating; our children are growing and they can no longer wait. To them we cannot say 'tomorrow'. Their name is today."

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Marie-Josée Jacobs, Minister of the Family of Luxembourg.

Mrs. Jacobs (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the children and young people of Luxembourg, I thank the United Nations most warmly for devoting this special session to their well-being. Two such young people, Béatrice and David, have accompanied and assisted me in preparing my statement.

The Government of Luxembourg associates itself with the position expressed by the representative of Spain on behalf of the European Union.

Along with the representatives of the vast majority of countries who have spoken from this rostrum, I pay tribute to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as an indispensable instrument for stimulating, guiding and assessing our various actions for the benefit of our children and young people. Enjoying the financial means to do so, Luxembourg is

able to undertake measures, some of them costly, to promote the well-being of its children. I believe that our country can take pride in its system of family benefits, housing assistance, the quality of its psycho-social and medical benefits and its sporting and cultural infrastructures. Our Government has invested heavily to improve education and training for its young people, to prevent the breakdown of families and to combat all forms of violence, exclusion and discrimination.

However, I must note that the well-being of children is not necessarily a function of how much money is invested. In Luxembourg, our children are not threatened by war, illiteracy, famine or untreated disease. They suffer other evils: emotionally dysfunctional families, conspicuous consumption, drug addiction, the dominant role of media of all types and the dangerous banalization of violence by many media.

In a world open to all kinds of influences, many parents, teachers and educators seem to lack pedagogical guideposts. Some practice educational styles that may well promote an "anything goes" attitude and emotional blackmail and may no longer be adequate in preventing delinquency of all types through consistent instruction in social behaviour. Such an atmosphere is likely to lead to dangerous temptations, such as intolerance and complacency, on the pedagogical, social and political levels.

While the majority of children and young people in the prosperous countries enjoy highly enviable material conditions, we must not forget the have-nots, particularly in the families of the unemployed, refugees, drug addicts, the psychologically vulnerable and the mentally ill. In our so-called two-track societies, the advancement of their rights requires a special effort.

I am also concerned about the increasing number of children who, in the framework of our traditional school system, are not able to develop their talents. Our countries must pursue their efforts to establish schooling that arouses and cultivates the resources of all students.

We cannot protect the rights of children without emphasizing their duties. This leads me to the third pillar of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Aside from protection and the provision of services, the Convention stresses the active participation of children. I believe that we all have an interest in accentuating this dimension of citizenship and responsibility. Children must have the right to speak out and to be heeded respectfully whenever their interests are at stake — in the family, at school, in their organizations, in the courts, in the media and in the presence of local, regional and national elected officials. I particularly wish to emphasize the particular efforts necessary to promote the equal participation of young girls and children from immigrant families.

It is up to parents, teachers and educators to help children and young people to learn to think clearly and to speak out in an articulate, lucid and responsible manner. In addition, we adults — decision makers, public servants and journalists — need to learn to hear these messages with empathy and respect. I am convinced that we have lessons to learn in countless situations — for example, as regards divorce, failure at school and the management of residential areas. I have indeed been delighted to be present at local forums where young people expressed to community decision makers their views about organizing their neighbourhoods. Yes, we have lessons to learn but, at the same time, we have a chance to inculcate in our children and young people more responsible, disciplined and community-minded attitudes. The challenge is a critical one. The children of today will be the adults of tomorrow.

As part of our commitment to the cause of children, it is our duty to form networks for cooperation that transcend national, communal and, even, continental borders. The struggle against commercial sexual exploitation can succeed only if we join our efforts and if the less privileged countries benefit from the solidarity of rich countries. Making a commitment to peace, combating the scourge of HIV/AIDS and protecting our environment effectively are other areas requiring joint action. I am glad that Luxembourg is dedicating some 0.8 per cent of its gross national product to various official development assistance projects within the context of our bilateral and multilateral cooperation network.

In addition, as the representative of the present Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, I note the early role in international cooperation played by the Council of Europe. The advancement of the rights of the child is a particularly important subject in that regard, as it is an integral part of protecting human rights. In its May 2001 message to representatives to this special session, the Committee of Ministers of the

Council of Europe emphasized its concern with respect to better promoting the active participation of children.

Mankind today has at its disposal dazzling technologies that open up boundless prospects for gains and progress. However, we are entitled to use them only as long as our goal is the well-being of all, and of the children of the world above all. We also need to make full use of our wisdom in order to prevent burdening future generations with a legacy of unhappiness and suffering.

I pay tribute to the countless men and women who teach with love, respect and compassion. I thank the numerous non-governmental organizations and their professional and volunteer staff members, who are committed to advancing humanitarian causes with such enthusiasm and competence.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, Secretary-General for the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, Director of the Child Development Project of Yemen.

Ms. Al-Jaifi (Yemen) (spoke in Arabic): It is a pleasure to begin by extending the greetings of President Ali Abdullah Saleh of the Republic of Yemen, who would like to express his appreciation for the efforts of decision makers and leaders the world over in connection with this special session devoted to children. President Saleh also reaffirms Yemen's commitment to make the rights of children a priority in our future plans of action. We wish this session every success. We would also like to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of our endeavours, including Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for her contribution to building a better world for our children.

This special session, which was to have been held last year, was postponed due to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. We condemned those attacks, just as we always condemn acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Yemen suffered from terrorist attacks long before other countries, and has supported all international efforts to combat terrorism and to eliminate its sources, whatever they may be.

The reports before the Assembly, and in particular the report presented by Secretary-General Kofi Annan (A/S-27/3), review national reports and the efforts made by States on behalf of children during the past decade. From those reports we learn that the achievements have been modest and that they have fallen short of the commitments made. The international community must avail itself of this opportunity to recommit itself and to re-evaluate the situation of children. In that regard, I must say that the abject poverty and lack of resources of families, especially in least developed countries, have hindered the attainment of all the goals for improving the status of children. Donors must meet their commitments by helping least developed countries to achieve their objectives and to carry out their national policies. They must also ensure development in poor countries, as that will contribute to improving the living standards of populations, including children.

My country is among the least developed of countries. We therefore face many problems that impede the attainment of objectives in the area of children. We nevertheless attach great importance to children, who represent some 50 per cent of our inhabitants. In fact, the State devotes 27.1 per cent of its budget to education and health. Let me speak of some indicators of our achievements in the fields of health, education and legislation as they relate to children.

Great progress has been made in the area of health, and many decisions have been adopted, including Council of Ministers decision 18/2002 and the resolution of the Minister for Health and Population to prevent sexual ablation, which is a social phenomenon conducted in only small areas of the country. Improved child health care has led to a reduction in child mortality. Mortality rates for children under 5 years of age have dropped from 230 per 1,000 to 105 per 1,000 since 1997. The gap between male and female education has also been reduced. Education of the girl child has been encouraged, especially in isolated rural areas.

With the participation of civil society institutions, the Government has also adopted many long-term reforms to improve education and health and to combat poverty, which affects 30 per cent of our population: 34.9 per cent of families currently live under the poverty line. The Government is also committed to educating marginalized and disabled children and reintegrating them into society, with the help of non-governmental organizations and special education programmes.

In the field of human rights, a national strategy project for human rights has been established and legislation consistent with international instruments has been adopted. Legislation on children has been adopted, and bill 161 of 2000 is now before the Parliament for adoption. All legislation regarding children is to be incorporated into a single law consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and with Islamic Sharia law.

I should like to highlight a few points from our discussions and documentation: the need to give the family an important role, the shared responsibility of fathers and mothers for child raising, the need to meet the challenges faced by families and the right of children to a high-quality education, all in accordance with Islamic principles that give children rights at the moment of conception. Priority should be placed on pre-school programmes, due to their contribution to the development of children's personalities.

In line with our moral duties as persons and States, in the framework of the United Nations, we are against things such as the presence of children in armed conflict — children must not be exploited as child soldiers — and the presence of children in occupied areas, which is a great tragedy. We call on the international community to put an end to the violence carried out daily against innocent Palestinian children, to put an end to the occupation, to put an end to the spilling of children's blood that has been occurring for more than 50 years, and to restore peace, safety and tranquillity to children's innocent hearts. Palestinian children want to experience their childhood in tranquillity and peace, as do other children in the world. We also reiterate that the suffering caused by the unjust economic embargo imposed on Iraq is an immense humanitarian tragedy whose victims include the hundreds of innocent Iraqi children who suffer every day. Therefore, we call for the lifting of the embargo and for an end to the suffering of Iraqi children.

Finally, it is our hope that the world's children will be able to live in a normal family environment, free from violence, exploitation and abuse. We hope that this special session will lead to consensus texts that can help children worldwide as well as all the other relevant parties: texts that can be respected and that do not run counter to revealed religions or to the specificities of our States.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hassen Abdella, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Mr. Abdella (Ethiopia): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the General Assembly on having placed this extremely important issue on its agenda for the consideration of the world community. My appreciation goes also to Ambassador Patricia Durrant, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for this special session, and to the other members of the Bureau for all their efforts to make the session a success.

The bright and prosperous future for which we long so much can be realized only if we give our children the attention they need, and if we give it to them today. Children will determine the course of our future development endeavours. They will have to shoulder the responsibility of finishing whatever good work we have begun and of furthering civilization. Therefore, they are the pillars of a bright, prosperous and more civilized tomorrow. How well they shoulder that responsibility tomorrow will, however, depend greatly on how well we prepare them today. Thus, in every major national and international forum, the needs and the problems of children have become the subject of intense debate and dialogue. The 1990 World Summit for Children was vivid testimony to the international community's concern to recognize the needs of children.

Based on the 1990 Summit Declaration and Plan of Action, the Government of Ethiopia, as part of its overall reform programme, has taken a number of initiatives to improve the conditions of Ethiopian children. Those measures include, inter alia, the adoption of the new Ethiopian Constitution and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additional measures have been taken to harmonize the laws of Ethiopia with the basic principles of the Constitution and of the Convention. New legislation has been enacted to establish a Human Rights Commission and an Ombudsman, both of which will have child protection units.

Apart from those legislative measures, national and sectoral development policies on education, health, water, population and developmental social welfare that place special emphasis on the well-being of children have been adopted and implemented. In order to enhance the institutional capacity of the school

system and to promote basic health services, the Government has allocated significant budgetary resources to those sectors. Consequently, encouraging achievements have been registered in immunization, in the polio campaign and in other related health care services and in the educational enrolment rate at the primary level. Thus, general health service coverage has been raised from 48 to 54 per cent, while the educational enrolment ratio at the primary level increased from 24 per cent in 1994-1995 to 57.4 per cent in 2000-2001. During the same period, female participation increased from 9.9 to 40.6 per cent.

In addition to those measures taken in the areas of policy and legislation, Ethiopia has submitted to its Parliament the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. It is expected that they will be ratified soon. In addition, Ethiopia has begun the process leading to the signature and ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The Government of Ethiopia has prepared a national plan of action to improve the well-being of Ethiopian children and women and to translate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into reality, in accordance with the Declaration. Never before has Ethiopia had such an action plan, shared by all Government institutions. The fact that all concerned bodies share the programme has made possible the planning and coordination of activities.

Children in Ethiopia and in other countries around the world have expressed what kind of future they would like to have by casting their votes in the Say Yes for Children campaign, ranking 10 priority issues that affect them. In Ethiopia, children have voted by ballot, on the Internet and by show of hands at organized events. For them, the most important issue facing their country is fighting and winning the war against HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, in recognition of the urgent need for concerted and accelerated action to tackle the HIV/AIDS problem, a national policy on HIV/AIDS has been adopted and a plan of action has been developed. National and regional HIV/AIDS councils and a secretariat responsible for the implementation of the policy have been established at both the federal and the regional levels.

Despite those positive developments, we still have a long way to go in creating favourable conditions for our children. The situation of children, therefore, has not yet improved as much as it should. That situation can be attributed to a number of factors, which include the decline of official development assistance, the payment of a huge amount of debt, unfavourable international trade, the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and poverty. Unless those situations are reversed, we cannot promise our children a world that is fit for them. Therefore, we need to take measures that are basic and realistic.

The alleviation of poverty would improve access to education, health facilities and other social services for children in particular and for the people in general. In view of this, my Government, in consultation with the public and with other stakeholders, is preparing a poverty-reduction strategy paper after a comprehensive analysis of the status of poverty and its determinants in the country. Needless to say, the primary responsibility for addressing poverty and for improving access to education, health and social services for the Ethiopian people in general and for children in particular rests upon my Government. However, it needs the support of the international community as well.

In conclusion, may I reiterate the firm conviction of my delegation that the Assembly will come up with workable and reliable solutions that can be translated into action. The solutions have to include enhanced international cooperation, increased development assistance, the total cancellation of debt, fair international terms of trade and improved foreign direct investment, particularly to the least developed countries. It is equally important that countries should give priority to the problems of children to the largest extent possible by allocating the available funds and utilizing them to improve the lives of children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Alesana Seluka, Minister for Education and Sports and Minister for Health of Tuvalu.

Mr. Seluka (Tuvalu): I am delighted and honoured to participate and speak on behalf of the Government and the people of Tuvalu at the special session of the General Assembly on children. Tuvalu is committed to the fundamental rights of the child as enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of Tuvalu and, likewise, to the Convention on the Rights

of the Child, to which Tuvalu acceded in 1995. Consistent with the principles contained therein, Tuvalu wishes to endorse the draft outcome document of the special session, which will provide a solid framework for achieving the goals of the Convention and of the Millennium Declaration.

In Tuvalu, as in other Pacific island societies, we value the fundamental importance of family and culture in bearing primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children. We therefore need not only to recognize the important role played by family and tradition but also to consider means to strengthen traditional institutions and practices by rendering appropriate assistance to parents, families and communities, so that children can grow and develop in a safe and stable environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

Significant progress has been achieved in the promotion of child welfare in Tuvalu since the World Summit for Children in 1990. In the area of health, improved programmes on maternal and child health and immunization have resulted in reduced infant and under-five mortality rates and in better access to drinking water and sanitation.

Despite the progress that has been made, a number of challenges remain, most seriously, the urgent need to improve the quality of medical services. The acute need for overseas patient referrals is adding strain to our meagre financial resources. That is further aggravated by the high cost of medical supplies, especially vaccines. We believe that a regional approach to the procurement of pharmaceuticals would be more cost-effective.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is of great concern to my country. The incidence of HIV/AIDS is highest among our seafarers who have gone overseas to work on merchant vessels and have contracted the killer virus abroad. Although our small economy has greatly benefited from the income earned and remitted back home by our seamen, it is through this particular group of our community that Tuvalu is exposed to the HIV/AIDS threat. Many of those seafarers have families, including children, to take care of at home, and one can imagine the devastating impact on families of those who return home with the killer virus. We agree that there is an urgent need to combat this killer disease, particularly a need for measures to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS among the more vulnerable groups, including children and seafarers. We therefore welcome the establishment of the Global Fund to combat HIV/AIDS as agreed at the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly, on HIV/AIDS.

Universal access to basic education is a key priority for Tuvalu, and significant progress has been made. However, we are concerned about the decline in the quality and standards of education in our schools.

The decline is linked to a combination of factors, and particularly to the inadequacy of human and financial resources. To address those issues, a national education forum will be convened later this year; it will be followed by a round table meeting with development partners to determine appropriate actions.

The progress achieved in these areas has been made possible through the support of donors and of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, to which we extend our appreciation. In addition, international and regional cooperative arrangements in certain areas have provided small island developing States such as Tuvalu with more cost-effective programmes. In education, for example, the University of the South Pacific based in neighbouring Fiji provides Tuvalu with tertiary educational opportunities, as Tuvalu cannot afford to run a university on its own, given its size and resources. These institutional cooperative arrangements at the international and regional levels need to be recognized and further strengthened in order to complement national development efforts, particularly for small island nations such as Tuvalu, which suffer greatly from the lack of resources and of economies of scale.

A country that has also been active in the promotion of the rights and welfare of children in many parts of the world but which is excluded from the United Nations and its agencies is the Republic of China on Taiwan. The contribution of the Republic of China needs to be properly acknowledged and recognized. We hope that the international community will support the Republic of China in its resolve to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations designed to promote the rights and welfare of children.

The security, along with the future well being of the children of Tuvalu, like those of many other low-lying small island developing States, will be seriously compromised by the impact of globalization and the threats of climate change and sea-level rise. Tuvalu's

capacity to cope with, and to take full advantage of, the opportunities offered by globalization is severely limited. Our children need assistance to develop their full potential if they are to be able to participate meaningfully in a globalized world.

The vulnerability of Tuvalu to the effects of global warming, particularly sea-level rise, deserves urgent action. It must be considered on humanitarian grounds. In the event that rising seas submerge our islands, as reported by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and others, we would inevitably become environmental refugees in our own land. Where, then, is the security and future of our children? We appeal to the international community, particularly the industrialized nations, to take immediate action to save our world from the ominous impact of global warming.

The implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action for children requires renewed political will and commitment if this special session is to succeed in truly creating a world fit for children. Within its capacity, Tuvalu will exert its efforts to achieve these goals for the benefit of children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Vilma Espín, Member of the State Council and President of the Federation of Cuban Women of Cuba.

Ms. Espín (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a result of the prevailing unjust international economic order and the exclusionary nature of neo-liberal globalization, more than two thirds of humankind live in abject poverty and are deprived of their most fundamental rights, including the right to life. Women, and especially children and adolescents, are the most seriously affected.

When the so-called end of the cold war process began, dignitaries and important leaders on both sides started to make promising statements regarding peace and progress for all and the allocation of the vast resources used in the arms race, which — once the nuclear peril was over — would be diverted to health, education and the eradication of hunger.

Yet, reality ran entirely counter to these promises. With the loss of the balance of power that the former Soviet Union guaranteed, a new unipolar world emerged dominated by the hegemonic super-Power of the United States, which uses its great economic strength not to improve the quality of life of its citizens in need, but to manufacture and use sophisticated killing devices — smart bombs, unmanned flying bombs, heavy bombs, nuclear devices that contaminate both those who are attacked as well as those who attack, and who knows what else? Many thousands of Yugoslav, Palestinian, Afghan and Iraqi boys, girls and adolescents have been murdered by these weapons. During the past 10 years, many others have also been killed in Iraq, where the Security Council has been used as a tool to deny them full access to food and medicine. To all this, we must add the hegemonic manipulation of United Nations organs and the repeated use and threat of use of the veto by the United States.

For a long time now, the world has witnessed the unyielding defence of the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination and its daily heroic battle against the Israeli occupation army. With horror and indignation we receive daily reports on the numbers of people killed, including boys and girls under the age of 17 and even four-day-old newborns. This savagery must be stopped.

This dehumanization also engenders the enormous corruption of thieves and traffickers of girls, boys and adolescents and of those who use them and make them the target of abuse, slave labour, sexual exploitation, prostitution and pornography, with the tragic sequel of HIV/AIDS and its ever growing number of innocent victims. Cuban legislation is very strict with those who sexually molest children.

In Cuba, since the beginning of the revolution, nothing has been more important than a child, and health and education have been free for the entire population. Despite the harshening of the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on our country for over 42 years, the political will and the full participation of all sectors of society have made it possible to achieve an infant mortality rate of 6.2 per 1,000 live births, while women are seen by a physician at least 10 times during pregnancy and child immunization coverage of 95.8 per cent has been attained against 13 diseases. Many of these vaccines are manufactured in our country. This has allowed us to donate to Uruguayan children the necessary doses of the meningitis meningococcal vaccine to combat the outbreak of that disease in their country.

Cuba provides free education and medical care to 99.2 per cent of girls and boys under five years of age. The enrolment rate is 100 per cent in primary education and 99.7 per cent in junior high school. The Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Rights of the Child respond to the same principles and purposes that govern and are fully applied in our country. Its rejection by the United States Government has prevented the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All children need protection, love and tenderness.

In the streets of many countries, the people, weary of all this, are striving to achieve their rights and standing up against lies, corruption and the main factors responsible for the harsh situation in which they live. It is extremely urgent to unite the enormous accumulation of wealth in the world, the immense fund of intelligence and the positive will to create a more just world where men and women can see their daughters and sons grow up without the dreadful threats that endanger the whole creative work of humanity today.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Dolores Balderamos-García, Minister of Human Development, Women and Civil Society of Belize.

Mrs. Balderamos-García (Belize): Recently, so much has happened in our world and the increasing chaos and confusion have caused tremendous pain and suffering, especially for our children. Now, we must change to make their lives better, for we know that we have not done enough. More is always said than done. Our children are our most precious gifts and we must start treating them as such.

At the World Summit we made a commitment to ensure the survival of our children, to protect them and to do everything possible to improve their development. That was a great moment in human history, for it reflected our commitment to the innocent and, more so, to the future. That is an accomplishment we celebrate, for the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most universally accepted United Nations declaration. But it is far from enough if every year more than 10 million children die before they reach the age of 5; of more than 100 million children, especially girls, do not go to school; and if more than 60 million are engaged in child labour. This should not be tolerated. We can, and we must, do better.

We live in a constantly changing world where technological advances and the rapid spread of information and communication are critical components of development. Without these we remain underdeveloped and our children continue to suffer. Therefore, to remain true to the commitments of the World Summit Declaration on the Rights of the Child, we must harness these tools of our time to improve the lives not only of a privileged few, but of all our people.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000, committed us to uphold the dignity of our peoples, and especially that of the children of the world. More specifically, we resolved to reduce by half the number of our poorest people, to ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will get an education, and to stop involving children in armed conflict, all by 2015. These are our expectations, and we should do our utmost to accomplish them.

In Central America and the Caribbean, children form the largest portion of our populations. The development of our nations is inextricably linked to their development. If we are to achieve sustainable human development, our children must go to school, have safe parks and playgrounds, be drug-free and be able to reach maturity before becoming parents. The current increase in the number of our children and young people affected by HIV/AIDS poses an even greater threat to development. As a region, we are addressing these issues, and we are making some progress.

Most of our children receive immunization vaccinations. We have reduced the infant mortality rate of children under the age of 5 by more then 20 per cent, and more of our children are enrolled in school. Our recently adopted Kingston Consensus produced 23 bold recommendations for continuing to improve their lives, and we enthusiastically support and endorse all those efforts. Yet we find ourselves having to do more with less. As official development assistance decreases, the demands on our already limited resources increase exponentially. For that reason we continue to appeal to our developed partners to support our efforts to save our children.

Belize's commitment to our children is sacred. We continue to make changes to improve their lives. Since 1999 the single largest portion of our national budget has been allocated to education. Through the Ministry of Human Development, our Government has

brought together the community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educators and Government officials to develop our own plan of action, which is instituted under the monitoring eye of the National Committee for Families and Children. We continue to support the efforts of other NGOs in this field, such as those of the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse.

Many of the indicators that measure our progress towards achieving the goals of the Convention show marked development. For example, by 1998 our under-5 mortality rate was 24.5 per 1,000 live births, an improvement of more than 50 per cent. We recently enacted new laws for the further protection of our children, making it mandatory to report child abuse and neglect, and we have provided better child-friendly procedures in our courts.

In his recent budget presentation, our Prime Minister stated:

> "Today the children of Belize have more educational opportunities than ever before. Young families have a better chance of owning their own homes than ever before. We are investing more in our health care system than ever before".

He acknowledged, however, that a lot more must be done to develop their confidence in the future.

Today my delegation is most honoured to have with us two beautiful young Belizeans. They are participating in this conference, full of hope and expectation. Like the other children among us, they are listening carefully to what we are saying. When they return home and gather with their friends at school and in their neighbourhoods they will speak of what we have said and done here. They will tell of the many heads of State or Government and other leaders who spoke of all the opportunities that the children of the world can, and should, have. They will recall the recommendations we made during our round table discussions, and through them our message will resonate among our young people. Our promises will become their promises. Perhaps we are not yet able to assure them that chaos and confusion will soon end forever, but we can promise to do more, so that they suffer less as a result of our actions. Let us never disappoint them, but instead ensure that our efforts will bring us closer towards creating a world truly fit for our children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Razmik Martirosyan, Minister for Social Security of Armenia.

Mr. Martirosyan (Armenia) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me to represent the Republic of Armenia at this special session of the General Assembly devoted to children.

Despite impressive technological progress, mankind is still bearing the shameful burden of child hunger, mortality and suffering because of inter-ethnic conflict and terrorism. Bridging the gap between technological and humanitarian development must become one of the major priorities for all mankind. At the same time, countries encountering problems with respect to children — which, unfortunately, still include my country — must realize that such problems cannot be resolved merely through technological achievement or through massive assistance from international humanitarian organizations and donor countries. Those problems can only be overcome through focused efforts by national Governments based on the principles of effective and democratic management and unwavering compliance with human rights.

My delegation would like to voice its satisfaction with the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the outcome document of the World Summit for Children, which contains an in-depth and comprehensive analysis and review of the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s. That report (A/S-27/3) and the targeted activity of the entire United Nations system, headed by Mr. Kofi Annan, demonstrate that the problems of children are at the very centre of the Organization's attention and that the United Nations, with the support of the entire international community, will do everything possible to improve the situation in this particularly sensitive and important area.

Children have traditionally been the subject of particular attention and concern in Armenian society and in the Armenian family. National traditions, in turn, determine State policy, which is predicated on the belief that childhood is of decisive and fundamental significance to a person's later life. A flawed childhood can in no way promote the formation of a normal and well-integrated personality. Therefore, the major objective of our national policy is the establishment of

an economic and legal basis for the normal growth, development, upbringing and education of children. Armenia's child protection policy would be less effective were it not for the active support it receives from the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

In addition, in 1993, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and other agencies, including non-governmental and international organizations and donor countries, Armenia formulated and implemented various carefully targeted programmes. As a result of their implementation, progress has been achieved in various areas. Over the past few years, the mortality rate for children under the age of 5 has been reduced by 25 per cent and child immunization coverage has reached 95 per cent. Breastfeeding indicators have more than tripled since 1993. Eighty-three per cent of the population now uses iodized salt. Since 1995, there has not been a single polio case in Armenia. The process of reforming the educational system has been pursued through comprehensive training methods and through the inclusion in school curricula of such new subjects as human rights, civic education, the State and law, and life skills. In the area of social security, there has been a clearer definition of the high priority to be accorded to children and a significant liberalization of the criteria for child disability. Programmes are being implemented to remove children from specialized children's institutions: foster families are being promoted as an alternative.

Nevertheless, despite a focused national policy and effective international cooperation, we have not fulfilled all of the objectives that we had intended to achieve by 2000. As a result of today's economic conditions, many problems with regard to health, education and social welfare remain vital issues. The wide gaps in society mean that too many children continue to live below the poverty line; more than 11,000 children still live in temporary housing and the number of child refugees exceeds 65,000. Problems relating to street children, to physically or mentally disabled children and to juvenile delinquency continue today in our country. There has been an increase in the number of children whose school attendance is not in keeping with the traditionally high educational standards in Armenia.

In addition to those problems — which are characteristic of the majority of countries with a transitional economy — Armenia must overcome specific problems resulting from the devastating 1988 earthquake, from the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh and from the economic blockade. Nevertheless, Armenia's experience has shown that, even under such unfavourable conditions, it is possible to achieve success through the elaboration of an appropriate national policy in combination with effective international cooperation and donor support.

As the Millennium Assembly demonstrated, the strengthening of peace and stability will remain the fundamental priority of the United Nations for decades to come, since our planet continues to be torn by conflicts that inflict suffering, first and foremost, on women and children. Located in a part of the world that has seen fundamental political and social transformations over the past decade, Armenia has unfortunately been affected by conflicts that have had the most unfavourable effects on children in our country. The policy of ethnic cleansing carried out by Azerbaijan against the Armenian minority beginning in February 1998 forced 360,000 people to flee to Armenia to escape the horrific pogroms unleashed in the Azerbaijani cities of Sumgait, Gyandza and Baku and in 311 other towns in Azerbaijan. As a result, Armenia was the first country in Eastern Europe to encounter the problem of refugees, especially child refugees. Armenia is committed to a peaceful solution to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict on the basis of the right to self-determination of peoples under foreign domination. The implementation of that inalienable right, reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration, is the only effective guarantee of a happy childhood and a safe and secure future for the children of the entire southern Caucasus region.

In conclusion, I should like to express the hope that this special session of the General Assembly will go down in history as an event that not only reflected the international community's concern at the situation of children throughout the world but also set forth an effective global strategy in that area. Indeed, concern for the future of children is a guarantee of a better future for all of mankind. Such objectives can and must promote the humanization of international relations and prompt mankind to realize its unity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abderrahim Zouari, Minister for Youth, Childhood and Sports of the Republic of Tunisia.

Mr. Zouari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to make a statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia.

At the outset, I should like to greet all participants and to thank all who have made sincere efforts to convene this special session and to ensure conditions conducive to its success, in particular the United Nations and its institutions, most notably the United Nations Children's Fund. I should like also to express my appreciation for the contribution of international and regional intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations devoted to children's issues in preparing this meeting.

In September 1990, in an unprecedented initiative, the international community adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and it recommended a pilot strategy to be used by States in implementing the Declaration. Today, we meet again to assess the extent to which Member States have achieved the goals of the World Declaration 12 years after it was adopted and to develop a new plan of action for the coming decade.

When we consider the preparations leading to this session and the recommendations that will be adopted, which will have been enhanced by the participation of governmental and other child-related organizations and associations, we can see that the international community is committed to children's causes and is aware of their importance, and that Governments and civil society are determined to pursue this course of action. Tunisia has ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and has developed a national strategy to implement its principles.

Today, we are proud to review our achievements on behalf of children, as they have exceeded the results expected from our national strategy. We are also proud of other initiatives, in particular the 1995 enactment of a special law for the protection of children. We have also developed implementation and follow-up mechanisms, including a corps of children's delegates, which is a preventive organ entrusted with monitoring at-risk children by means of notifications and which, together with other entities concerned with children, deals with juvenile offenders.

We have established a monitoring mechanism responsible for information, training, documentation and surveys on the protection of the rights of children. It monitors children's circumstances, collects related information both nationally and internationally and contributes to the development of policies and programmes aimed at enhancing the rights of children and protecting their development and growth.

We have set up a forum for dialogue, called the Children's Parliament, to instil in children at an early age the values of responsibility, tolerance, democracy, an openness to different opinions and a sense of involvement in public life, through discussion of all issues related to their concerns. Tunisia has recently acceded to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on armed conflicts and on sexual exploitation.

Tunisia has adopted a model for sustainable development in which economic concerns are complemented by social concerns. Tunisia is a developing nation that allocates 50 per cent of its budget to social programmes, with 20 per cent of the national budget allocated to the education and training sectors. That has been so since our country's independence. That effort has helped raise the school enrolment rate to 99 per cent; it was accompanied by qualitative reform of the educational system, enhancement of educational curricula, improvement of conditions in educational institutions and measures to ensure that children remain in school until age 16.

In addressing childhood issues, we have relied on a set of policies and programmes that reflect our comprehensive approach to children's rights and our determination to provide all children with equal opportunities. We believe that the family circle is the best environment in which to educate and care for children. The only way to attain that goal is to reinforce women's position in society, to strengthen the role that mothers play in looking after their children and to develop health and demographic programmes to serve those ends.

In Tunisia, we have consolidated the gains made by the family and by women and have enshrined the social and political rights of women in both legislation and practice, which has helped women become partners in society, enjoying full rights. Our country has been able to reduce our population growth rate to 1.15 per cent. The fertility rate has been reduced to 2.2 children per woman. The infant mortality rate has been reduced

to 26 per 1,000, and female life expectancy has risen to 74 years.

We have reinforced our social options by establishing a National Solidarity Fund to support the State's efforts to end the isolation of remote areas, to develop a broad range of services and facilities, to provide the population with employment and income opportunities and to integrate people in the country's economic cycle.

The success of Tunisia's experience in this field clearly contributed to the international community's positive reaction to our call for establishing a World Solidarity Fund. While I express my pride at that positive reaction, I hope the initiative will find its way to implementation as soon as possible.

Although reports from the United Nations Development Programme have affirmed the ability of many nations to reconcile economic with social concerns and to invest in human-resource development, we believe that the progress achieved by such nations and their successes in the area of childhood require us to develop a new pattern of cooperation to exchange technical skills, to be coordinated by the United Nations and its specialized institutions.

In many regions around the world, children are still deprived of their most basic rights and face severe difficulties that cannot be ignored. Regardless of whatever priorities are recommended in caring for children during the next decade, an effective translation into fact of international solidarity is likely to bring hope to children who have been deprived of their right to decent living conditions and a sound upbringing. Today, Palestinian children endure the afflictions of occupation. Iraqi children suffer from the effects of the embargo. African children are overwhelmed by poverty, hunger, disease and the problems created by armed conflicts. Many other children worldwide face exploitation and violation.

We are duty-bound to unite our efforts and initiatives in caring for children and addressing their causes; in this way, we can live up to the trust placed in us and meet the challenges we face in creating a better future for our children and for mankind as a whole.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to by His Excellency Major General Sein Htwa, Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar.

Mr. Htwa (Myanmar): At the outset, my delegation would like to extend our congratulations to Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election as President of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, on children. We believe that under his able leadership, the session will produce concrete results that will benefit our cherished children.

The rights of the child have been given top priority in the global agenda since the World Summit for Children. The same is true of our national agenda. The Government of Myanmar gives top priority to children both legally and as a matter of tradition. Since our accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have formulated and implemented programmes at the national level for the well-being and interests of children. On 14 July 1993, two years after our accession to the Convention, we promulgated our Child Law. In September 1993, we formed a National Committee on the Rights of the Child to effectively and successfully implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the Child Law.

Furthermore, committees on the rights of the child have been formed at the state, division, district and township levels to implement the Convention and the Child Law throughout the country. In 1996, we submitted our first national report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The second national report was submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in March 2002. On 21 December 2001, the Child Rules, relating to the Child Law, were issued to implement the Law.

In Myanmar's culture, children are valued as treasures, and they are loved and nurtured with special care and attention. It has been a time-honoured tradition of Myanmar families to place emphasis on the all-round development of children to ensure their protection, upbringing and development. As the Myanmar family is of an extended nature, the children of Myanmar families are nurtured not only by their parents, grandparents and other relatives but also by their communities.

Let me apprise this Assembly of our national efforts for the realization of the rights of the child. I wish to stress first of all that, in Myanmar, children are given equal opportunities irrespective of sex, race and religion. For instance, in the basic education sector, 50.1 per cent of the student population are boys, while

49.9 per cent are girls. In the health sector, children have access to equal medical treatment, services and facilities at hospitals and clinics regardless of gender.

We have formulated the National Programme of Action and the National Health Plan (1996-2001) and have implemented them for the survival, protection and development of children. At present, a National Health Plan (2001-2006) for the health and nutrition of children and environmental sanitation has been drawn up and is being implemented. A nationwide programme, in cooperation with UNICEF, is also being carried out. As a result, remarkable progress has been made throughout the country, including in the far-flung border areas.

Other measures which we have taken to improve children's health include immunization programmes. National Immunization Day has been observed since 1996 and immunization has been successfully carried out as a mass movement throughout the country. Extensive immunization programmes also cover remote border areas.

In the education sector, with a view to promoting the all-round development of children under five, the Government and the public have established centre-based and school-based pre-primary schools. The Government is making every effort to ensure that children enjoy the right to basic primary education. We have also undertaken activities in the context of our Education For All programme. To fully implement the programme's activities, we have drawn up projects and are implementing them in collaboration with UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. We are also taking measures for the health and social rehabilitation of disabled children under school- and community-based rehabilitation programmes.

In its effort to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, the National Committee on the Rights of the Child is closely cooperating with the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs concerning trafficking in women and children. In this respect, we are also cooperating actively with other countries in the Mekong region and the Association of South-East Asian Nations concerning transnational trafficking in persons, women and children in particular. We also have legal provisions to prevent the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict. Under the Regulation for Persons Subject to the Defence Services Act, which was issued on 8 April 1974 under War Office Council instruction 13/73, a person cannot be enlisted into the armed forces until he has attained the age of 18.

In order to prevent drug abuse among children, effective measures have been taken through the launching of educational programmes all over the country. At the same time, under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law, those offenders who make use of children to commit an offence relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances shall be liable to the maximum punishment provided for such an offence.

Future generations belong to the children of today. It is imperative to help them in their development so that they will grow into fully capable human beings and be able to enjoy the full range of their rights in this rapidly globalizing world. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to bequeath to children a peaceful and developed world where they will have a secure and enabling environment in which to develop their individual capacities. In the past decade, we have achieved significant results. We need to continue our current efforts to obtain similar results in the future as well. Let me stress that Myanmar is committed to the full realization of the rights of children in a sustained manner. The achievements Myanmar has made reflect our firm commitment.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Myanmar's commitment to making every effort for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. I assure the Assembly that we will work together with added momentum towards that goal.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Cristian Munduate, Minister for Social Welfare of Guatemala.

Ms. Munduate (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Slightly more than 10 years ago, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children gave rise to a new way of looking at the world — one centred on children. The time is therefore right for taking stock of the advances achieved and the tasks remaining.

During that decade, very significant changes took place in my own country at the social and political

levels. Midway through that period, following 36 years of internal armed conflict, the peace agreements that constitute our strategic frame of reference were concluded. Among other gains, substantial advances were made in respect of most of the goals set at the World Summit for Children. In the health area, we managed to reduce infant mortality from 73 to 45 per 1,000 children born alive, while the death rate of children under five fell from 110 to 59 per 1,000. We are, however, still far from the desirable indicators, so that the need to continue reducing those rates and maternal mortality are priority aims within the social policy of the Government.

Moreover, although the malnutrition indices were reduced, malnutrition is still one of the main causes of illness and death in the country. It has, in addition, a negative effect on the learning capacity of our boys, girls and adolescents. A significant step forward was taken with the establishment of the Social Development Law and the Programme of Reproductive Health Policy, within which education, including the need to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, is a sizeable component.

As regards education, and in keeping with the worldwide trend, the rate of primary school enrolment has evolved positively, having risen from 35 per cent in 1990 to 81 per cent in 2000. That is not enough, however, inasmuch as deficiencies in the area of education are the main factor limiting the development of the country. That is why education has risen to the top of the social agenda, the aim being to ensure that by 2004 the rate for primary education will have increased by 20 per cent and illiteracy will have fallen by the same proportion. Educational reform seeks to develop thought processes, values and attitudes capable of establishing equitable and tolerant relations between peoples and cultures that can, in the medium term, contribute to the consolidation of Guatemalan democracy.

In the same vein, the family is being supported, with the object of reducing child labour and encouraging boys and girls to attend and remain in school. Some years ago, child labour was not recognized as a problem; today, we are bent on eradicating it.

Since Guatemala is a plurilingual and multicultural country, bilingual education is key to ensuring that boys and girls do not drop out of school. That is why we note with satisfaction that the declaration before us, entitled "A world fit for children", reiterates the principle of non-discrimination and the commitment to doing everything possible to guarantee that boys, girls and adolescents have access to the various services.

Our agenda for the next decade must include the revision of our development model so that it stops perpetuating poverty and provides for a more just system based on investing in children — a model whose aim is the integral development of children and adolescents through public policy directed in their favour. The chief objectives of that agenda should be to ensure universal access to basic health services, environmental sanitation, education and proper nutrition; full participation by children and adolescents; the establishment of protective mechanisms oriented principally towards strengthening the family so as to avoid the institutionalization of boys and girls as much as possible; revision and codification of adoption procedures; a rigorous fight against drugs and an all-out struggle against the sexual and commercial exploitation of children, together with legal reforms that severely punish adults who corrupt our children; the strengthening of a sound juvenile justice system; and the strengthening of preventive and other actions seeking the rehabilitation of adolescents caught up in gangs.

Finally, regarding our international agenda, I am pleased to announce that yesterday we deposited our instruments of ratification of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We are conscious of the magnitude of the challenge; but we trust that through our own efforts, the participation of our children and adults and international cooperation we shall bring about a more inclusive and equitable reality for the children of Guatemala.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kamal Kharrazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran): It is a distinct honour for me to speak at this special session of the General Assembly on the 10-year review of the World Summit for Children — a global event to whose success the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran feel duty-bound to make their

contribution. This is indeed a very propitious opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, evaluate accomplishments made thus far and obstacles encountered along the way, identify the challenges ahead and look for further initiatives and measures to meet those challenges and ensure the sustainable progress of children in the years and decades to come. In brief, we are all here to work for a world fit for children.

The hectic and intensive negotiations over the text of the draft final outcome document of this review conference is, if nothing else, an indication of the formidable challenges the international community faces in grappling with the question of how better to implement the World Summit outcome and commitments at all levels. This daunting task is being rendered much more difficult by differences emanating from the unjust state of world affairs, including the imposition of unilateral coercive measures. This hampers the creation of a safe and supportive environment for children, particularly in developing countries.

Needless to say, existing problems related to children are somewhat different from those of the past in terms of their nature, scope and cause. Therefore, the first and foremost task before us is to undertake an honest appraisal of past experiences; to update the goals adopted at the World Summit so as to address major new challenges; to define specific areas of action; to determine how to shape the operational strategies for attaining measurable goals; and to ensure the establishment of a progressive international mechanism in the best interests of children. The goals should be innovative and action-oriented, utilizing all available resources and tools to make a major difference towards the elimination of the obstacles in the way of improving the situation of children on a global scale, particularly in the developing world.

In our view, the institution of the family is a safe and secure environment for children. As the basic unit of society, the family has primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children. A happy relationship between child and parents is certainly essential to realizing the child's innate potential and the development of a more humane order. It is from this vantage point that we develop our plans and strategies at the national level and formulate our positions on the international scene.

In a world marked by an uneven distribution of wealth and opportunities, a lack of security, exclusion and armed conflicts, the plight of children must be given paramount attention and prominence. The saddening situation of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation is not only a clear manifestation of the brutal practices of an occupying Power against children, but also a grave injustice to humanity as a whole. We cannot, and should not, remain indifferent to the deterioration of the situation of Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territories due to the continuing inhumane policies and practices of the Israeli forces that are resulting in an acute humanitarian situation, such as the one we have all witnessed in the Jenin refugee camp. This global review conference is a unique occasion to address this dire and heartbreaking situation.

Let me now turn to the national scene. Having actively participated in the World Summit for Children and having made its contribution to the final outcome, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has since vigorously pursued the implementation of the Summit's Plan of Action. The policy devoted to the expansion of civil society and the institutionalization of its role at the national level has also contributed to more active engagement and participation by children and young people in various walks of social and political life. In recent years, Iranian young people have played a paramount and ever-increasing role in the social and political life of Iranian society, including in national elections.

Our overall policy towards children and young people is based on exalted Islamic precepts and values, as well as on the letter and spirit of our Constitution and of commitments derived from international instruments, in particular the World Summit outcome and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To fulfil those commitments, Iran has prepared and submitted its national report on the current situation of children in the country, as required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our national report identifies, in clear terms, both areas of improvement and obstacles encountered.

The provision of basic services, particularly in the fields of health and education, has been high on the agenda of the Government. Those services have contributed to the improvement of children's conditions across the country. For example, the mortality rate of children has fallen steadily and the

number of children attending primary school has drastically increased in the course of the past decade.

In our country's third five-year development plan, which is currently in force, special attention has been paid to the goal of promoting and protecting children's rights. In that context, the sectors of education, art and culture, health, health care and nutrition, social security and rehabilitation, physical training and other activities relating to youth and women are together allocated up to 43 per cent of the country's total budget. Despite unfavourable external factors, economic hardship and the long-term financial and social implications of hosting more than 2 million refugees over the past two decades, a considerable portion of total public expenditure has been allocated to the development of children in all fields.

In addition, the Parliament has been active in the promulgation of necessary legislation, with a view to improving the conditions for children and youth throughout the country. A new bill has been initiated in the Parliament that focuses on child growth, protection and development. The bill aims at tackling the major causes of the social and family problems to which children may be subjected. It is also noteworthy that the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 182 of 1999 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour was recently adopted by the Parliament; Iran has thus become a party to the Convention.

Improving the situation of children in various fields, in all societies and on a global scale calls for the resolute will and the determination of the entire human community. Therefore, I should like to avail myself of this unique opportunity, on the historic occasion of this special session, to appeal to all participants: we must join hands in solidarity, rise to the challenge and commit ourselves individually and collectively to make the lives of all children around the globe a humane and fulfilling experience in the coming years and decades. Let us resolve not to be found wanting in that solemn commitment.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to remind participants that there are still 11 speakers on my list and that statements should not exceed five minutes in length.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Pennelope Beckles, Minister for Social Development of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. Beckles (Trinidad and Tobago): At the 1990 World Summit for Children — the first such large gathering of leaders — a promise was made to the children of the world. We promised that they would enjoy the best possible start in life and that they could rely on our protection in times of war and peace, at home and at school. We committed ourselves to ensuring that they would reach their fullest potential, regardless of gender, creed or ethnic or socio-economic background. The World Declaration and Plan of Action set out specific goals related to children's survival, health, nutrition, education and protection. Our promise was not conditional on factors such as the state of our economies, but was predicated on the understanding that the well-being of our children should always be our highest priority — always.

I am sure we will all agree that children never forget a promise. Our presence at this special session shows that we have not forgotten either. The comprehensive assessment provided by the Secretary-General in his report "We the Children" (A/S-27/3) illustrates that, although the progress achieved for children has been significant, it has not been enough. The fundamental objectives of this special session must therefore be to identify the obstacles that have prevented us from achieving the goals to which we had committed ourselves and to take all necessary action to ensure the success of our new goals.

Over the past decade, Trinidad and Tobago has achieved a considerable measure of success in implementing the Plan of Action. In the area of education, we have established systems to facilitate access by every child to a primary and a secondary school education, and we are working to increase the percentage gaining access to tertiary-level education. The laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago provide that education is mandatory for all children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. Tuition is free at public and Government-assisted schools, and more than 70 per cent of children benefit from an expanded early childhood education.

In the area of health, more than 90 per cent of our children are immunized against all major childhood diseases, and almost all births are attended by skilled health personnel. The school health service is integrated into the primary health care system, and the health education component of the school curriculum has been strengthened. Recent data show a decrease in malnutrition in children. The Government has

enhanced a school nutrition programme in which free hot lunches are provided daily to thousands of schoolchildren at the primary and secondary school levels, and food hampers are distributed to needy families on a monthly basis.

Trinidad and Tobago has introduced child-centred legislation and has amended existing legislation to bring it into conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A family court and a children's authority to oversee matters related to children are soon to be established.

In spite of those gains, our performance in other areas has not been as anticipated. For example, the targets set for reduction in maternal, infant and under-5 mortality rates have not been realized. That is a cause for much concern. In addition, HIV/AIDS has emerged as a burning issue in Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, across the Caribbean region, which is reported to have the highest rates in the world outside sub-Saharan Africa. There is increasing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The Government has therefore introduced a pilot project to address that situation. Without a doubt, HIV/AIDS is a major development challenge for the coming decade. Trinidad and Tobago has recognized that fact and has embarked on a process to formulate an integrated response to deal with the epidemic.

The culture of violence is a global phenomenon permeating the family, the schools and the community. We acknowledge that our efforts to combat escalating violence — especially domestic violence and, more recently, violence in schools — require more concerted attention. The Government is therefore engaged in a collaborative process with stakeholders at all levels, and it has developed strategies and programmes to curtail the increase in violence.

Poverty and inequity are related to those problems, and evidence suggests that children are among the most vulnerable. The precarious situation faced by children in developing countries has been further exacerbated by major reductions in official development assistance, coupled with the negative impacts of globalization. I appeal to my fellow leaders to make education — especially early childhood education, care and development — a development priority in the light of its potential to break the cycle of poverty. Members of civil society should partner with Governments and multilateral institutions to effect positive change in that area.

That poverty and inequity are increasing at a time of global wealth, astounding technological advances and the emergence of a knowledge-based economy suggests that the real issue is a shortage of neither resources nor capacity but rather of political will, political commitment, political priority and political vision.

We need to make the well-being of our children our highest priority. The best investment for the future is investing in our children now. As we reaffirm our commitment to children in formulating our policies, we should strive to ensure their well-being. In that respect, the implementation of the plan of action resulting from the special session will help ensure that we do, in fact, bequeath a world fit for children.

We have the opportunity to renew our commitment to the children of the world. We have within our grasp the chance to create a future free of malnutrition, free of violence, free of abuse and free of poverty. Such a vision is not so much noble as it is right. The global resources necessary are available. It is up to us as leaders to make this vision a reality.

In closing, my delegation would like to congratulate Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica for her sterling contribution and leadership as Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call now on His Excellency Mr. Aboudramane Sangaré, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Sangaré (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of my delegation, I shall take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-Soo on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly and to reiterate the pride that the Côte d'Ivoire feels at the way in which Secretary-General Kofi Annan has organized the special session on children. We equally congratulate the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Ms. Carol Bellamy, as well as Miss Patricia Durrant, for their work to make the special session on children a success.

The head of State of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Laurent Gbagbo, wished to be here today on such an important occasion but was unable to come for reasons beyond his control. He instructed me to communicate to the

Assembly his wishes for the success of our deliberations.

The special session is of great importance to my country because the majority of the Ivorian population is young: 52 per cent of the population is under the age of 18. Ensuring the well-being of that segment of the population and protecting their rights is imperative for the Government of the Côte d'Ivoire. That is why Côte d'Ivoire ratified without reservation the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 4 February 1991 and has acceded to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

In September 1992, our country created a national plan of action for the survival, development and protection of the child in accordance with the recommendations of the 1990 World Summit, and it has submitted its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

My Government has adopted policies to promote children's rights by adopting laws, inter alia, to end the practice of female genital mutilation, to prohibit non-consensual and early marriages and to implement operational strategies for the development and protection of children. Those measures are starting to bear fruit.

The intense awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS, including the participation of the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, to whom I wish to pay well-deserved tribute, has had a positive impact on behaviours in relation to that disease. The campaign to eradicate polio has had considerable success, and measures to distribute insecticide-treated mosquito netting to reduce malaria deaths have been encouraging. The number of deaths attributable to the most widespread child illnesses is decreasing due to a sustained vaccination campaign.

The Minister for the Family, Women and Children and the Minister for Health, responsible for the national education campaign on HIV/AIDS are responsible for implementing the policy of promoting children's rights and welfare. They are supported in their actions by the National Committee to Combat Child Trafficking and Exploitation, the National Committee to Combat Violence Against Women and Children and the National Commission on Women and Children.

Ensuring the welfare of children means not only safeguarding their health but also giving them a solid education so that they can be future agents of development. Our Government is working to do this despite the difficulties encountered in the implementation of a consistent policy to promote education oriented towards the employment of young people. More than 40 per cent of the national budget is spent on education, which is now compulsory and free until the age of 16.

A policy for the advancement of children requires a resolute effort to fight poverty. A poor population can only engender destitute children whose future is at risk. Ensuring the well-being of the population by reducing poverty is a priority of our development policy.

The problem of transborder child trafficking, increasingly denounced by the media, is an issue of great concern to the Ivorian Government. Côte d'Ivoire is essentially an agricultural country. Its development is based on cash crops such as cacao, which is grown by village planters on small-scale family plantations. Workers from neighbouring countries have acquired plantations operating on the same, family-run basis, and over the years have brought into the country their relatives, including children, to help them in their agricultural work. On the pretext of legitimately reuniting such families, unprincipled traffickers have created transborder networks unbeknownst to the Ivorian authorities or, sometimes, to the authorities of the countries of origin. Those individuals then often exploit the poverty and blind faith of the children's relatives. As soon as it became aware of the problem, the Ivorian Government took vigorous measures to eliminate that scourge. At the national level, an emergency plan was adopted to improve the social, educational and economic conditions of identified children and families in at-risk zones. Awareness campaigns were carried out in areas of possible utilization of child labour. Children who had been the victims of traffickers are identified and repatriated; the authors of those offences are punished. A minimum working age has been established, and child labour rules have been adopted. A draft law on child trafficking and exploitation is before the National Assembly. On 25 July 2001, a national committee to combat child trafficking and exploitation was created.

At the subregional level, our country participated in numerous joint initiatives such as the workshop on child labour and child trafficking, particularly of girl domestic servants in West and Central Africa, which was held in Cotonou in Benin in 1998. On 8-10

January 2002, a meeting was held in Yamoussoukro on child trafficking in West and Central Africa, with the participation of several States, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as United Nations agencies. On 1 September 2000, Côte d'Ivoire signed an agreement with Mali on cooperation in the fight against transborder child trafficking. Our country also sent missions led by the Prime Minister to Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso in 2001.

At the international level, Côte d'Ivoire ratified the International Labour Organization Convention 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Convention 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, for which the instruments of ratification were deposited last 6 March. Ivorian authorities are experiencing serious difficulties in the fight against child trafficking despite their political will and their determination to eradicate this scourge. They are confronted with the problem of porous borders due to insufficient material, human and financial resources in the face of the increasingly sophisticated methods used by child traffickers.

In this area, as in many others, coordinated and concerted action by the international community is necessary to counter that abominable crime. The fight against child trafficking must be taken both to its place of origin and to the final destinations of its victims. I take this opportunity to express my Government's gratitude to the United Nations Children's Fund, which is assisting us in combating this problem.

According to the report of the Secretary-General, progress has been made over the past 10 years, but major challenges continue to exist. The time is therefore ripe for us to heighten our awareness. Governments, international organizations, institutions, civil society, the private sector and people of good will must mobilize their efforts to combat poverty, the scourge of our time and the source of the destruction of so many innocent lives. This is the moment to call for a true partnership on behalf of the children of the world. As the Secretary-General's report emphasizes, what is lacking is neither the financial nor the scientific means, but the political will of those who have the wherewithal to save the children of our planet.

May this special session revive the desire to pool our resources in order to give each child the chance to live and to flourish regardless of his or her origin. It is by investing in our children that we invest in the progress of humankind. Yes, the child is the future of humankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Ms. Tamam El-Goul, Minister for Social Development of Jordan.

Ms. El-Goul (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, allow me to express my gratitude to the members of the Preparatory Committee for the special session of the General Assembly on children and to the United Nations Children's Fund for their arduous and sustained work in search of the common denominator that unites us all: the advancement and well-being of our children.

I would also like to pay tribute to all delegations, non-governmental organizations and members of the Secretariat who worked assiduously in following up the World Summit for Children.

A decade after the landmark Summit of world leaders that embodied an unprecedented political will of the international community to put children first, we gather here today to reinvigorate the global efforts launched in 1990 towards the advancement of children's rights and the development of international norms addressing the urgent needs of children, and to generate the resources needed for local capacity-building to improve children's lives and to save them from misery.

My delegation hopes that this special session will refocus the political will of the international community to follow up and implement the commitments and standards contained in the final Declaration regarding the right of children to survival, protection, development and participation at all levels. The goal is to make children the object and builders of sustainable development.

In spite of the global achievements that have been made in advancing some of the issues related to the basic needs of children, there is widespread dismay that progress has fallen short of the goals set, despite the concrete nature of the issues raised and the realistic time frames set for addressing them. Poverty and socio-economic disparities are increasing within communities and between countries of the North and the South. This presents the biggest obstacle to meeting the goals for

the overall development of children, including enjoyment of their rights.

Therefore, we now hope for the emergence of a new concept of comprehensive security that goes well beyond military and economic factors in their traditional meanings and that incorporates social safety nets and human dignity into basic decision-making at the international level. The world today is interconnected by common goals and yet diversified in its modalities of action. Human security and the prevention of violations of human rights in general, and children's rights in particular, have thus become integral parts of contemporary security doctrine. We recall that the first World Summit for Children addressed issues related to the dire conditions of children in armed conflict, including as victims of foreign occupation.

In Jordan, we welcome the entry into force of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the development of international standards protecting the rights of children in armed conflict. We invite the international community to invest greater importance and commitment in this issue. Children throughout the world are subject to extreme suffering due to armed conflict, violence, siege and collective punishment, all of which threaten to drive certain vulnerable elements of the new generations towards violence. Today, the painful circumstances under which Palestinian children are living are a vivid illustration of the need for the international community to assume the responsibility of protecting the rights of the child from being violated in any way.

We in Jordan feel that the real challenge for developing countries lies in making the best possible use of the limited resources available to satisfy urgent needs. Nevertheless, we also believe that using communication and information technologies for the diffusion of knowledge and teaching and for improving children's education is an important element in enabling them to cope with the demands of the contemporary world.

The initiative launched by His Majesty King Abdullah II to prioritize the availability of information technology to all schools in Jordan and to enhance the skills of teachers — as a component of the economic and social programme of transformation adopted by the Government — is further testimony to our keen interest in the development and growth of our children with a view to preparing and equipping them for the challenges of life now and in the future.

The programme of economic and social transformation in Jordan aims at improving the standards of living of the individual citizen by establishing an enabling environment for investment, creating job opportunities and providing quality training for the workforce. It also includes the development of the necessary legislation for achieving economic and social development and establishing the institutional mechanisms to revise and follow up on this legislation, such as the upgrading of the judiciary and the establishment of the Royal Committee for Human Rights and the National Council for Family Affairs. It also includes the creation of special juvenile courts and training and rehabilitation centres.

The programme further aims at enhancing the educational sector and at providing quality education to prepare our citizens to respond to the requirements of globalization and an open economy, in which Jordan has chosen to be an active player. The reform of that sector also includes improving the school meals programme for early primary education, in partnership with civil society. In the health sector, the Government is expanding and improving health services, especially those relating to both motherhood and childhood.

The Government of Jordan, in its effort to meet its obligations to improve the lot of our children, is well aware that promoting children's rights and well-being requires effective partnership on the domestic, regional and international levels, and the meaningful contribution of civil society and the private sector. Political will is indeed necessary to maintain the momentum generated so far. However, the challenges that still lie ahead require true partnership among us all to build a world truly fit for children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dimitris Thanos, Vice-Minister for Health and Social Affairs of Greece.

Mr. Thanos (Greece) (*spoke in Greek; English text furnished by the delegation*): Greece, as a State Member of the European Union, aligns itself fully with the statement made by the Spanish presidency.

The 1989 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with the 1990 Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children,

gave a fresh impetus to the debate on children's rights. During the past decade we have seen that these essential instruments are being taken seriously and that a range of initiatives and measures has been designed to promote the interests of children.

I wish to congratulate the Secretary-General on his excellent report entitled "We the Children: Meeting the promises of the World Summit for Children" (A/S-27/3). The report contains a comprehensive analysis of the progress we have made and of the obstacles we have encountered in our efforts to fully realize the rights of the child. We take satisfaction from the improvements that have been made; at the same time, we realize the enormous challenges that still lie ahead. This special session on children is an important opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its determination to tackle the tasks before us.

Making sure that all children enjoy healthy lives, quality education and protection within a stable and suitable environment is a significant policy aim. It is obvious that the perspective of the child and children's best interests have become more visible in policies, administrative procedures and day-to-day practices.

However, in spite of these positive developments, the present state of society falls short of its objectives, even in the most developed countries. We are faced with an environment that remains unfriendly towards children and with persistent evidence of factors — such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, social exclusion, political instability, armed conflict and convincing role models — that put children at great risks.

In the view of Greece, urgent priorities for children include developing sustainable health and social systems and guaranteeing full access to them without discrimination. Special emphasis must be placed on ensuring universal access to primary education, which can be a major component in breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Families, as the primary caretakers of children, remain the basic unit in society, and their role must be recognized and their capacity to offer guidance and protection strengthened.

In addressing the problems facing children, Greece has consistently been taking a number of measures. For instance, more and more emphasis has been placed on primary health care and prevention through reform of the national health system. During the past decade many activities have been initiated with the aim of improving reproductive and sexual health. Key priorities include family planning, maternal health, prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and sexual education and counselling.

In order to tackle poverty and social exclusion, last year the Government presented a national action plan on social inclusion that contains such pro-child measures as a benefit for large families, third-child benefits and day care facilities. In the framework of the plan, two new benefits were announced: grants for poor households in rural areas that will enable families to bear the burden of caring for children, and a school benefit so that children can stay in school.

In the field of education, the concern in Greece has been to improve the quality of public education. To this end, all-day schools have been introduced and a great effort has been made to ensure sufficient and suitable facilities for all schools. All children, regardless of their nationality or residency status, even undocumented children, enjoy nine years of free compulsory education.

For the protection of children's rights, a national monitoring mechanism was established by law at the end of 2001, and a public debate was held recently on the institution of a children's ombudsman, which Greece is seriously examining. Finally, the Youth Parliament, now in its sixth consecutive year, ensures that the voices of children are heard at the highest level.

To face the different needs of children, we need integrated policies and permanent coordination mechanisms to develop coherent action plans and monitor their implementation. We need to involve civil society, especially non-governmental organizations in such collaboration. Our objectives must be to make the best use of all available resources, to build upon positive experiences and to learn from the negative ones. These objectives require cooperation at all levels, especially at the global one.

In considering childhood policies we must see children as partners with equal rights in their families and as active members of society who can assist in shaping tomorrow's world, which will be their world. We adults should join children in building a present and a future in which children's rights and needs are taken fully into account.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*) I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echevarría, Chairman of the delegation of Costa Rica.

Mr. Rodríguez Echevarría (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): A common desire brings us together at this special session: that our children and adolescents can fully enjoy their rights and fulfil their dreams. Much has been achieved since the 1990 World Summit for Children, but much also remains to be done. Mankind has not yet paid its debt to younger generations.

Millions of adolescents become parents without being prepared. To prevent that we must teach them the responsibility that parenthood entails. We must help adolescent mothers, so that they can nurture and provide better opportunities for their babies. We have done that in Costa Rica through our "Young Love" and "Building Opportunities" programmes. Our nations' adolescents, as well as their children, demand our help.

We cannot fail to congratulate the 63 countries that have reduced the rate of mortality in children under 5 by a third and the 100 others that have reduced it by a fifth. Nevertheless, 10 million children still die annually due to easily preventable diseases. In Costa Rica we have been able to reduce child mortality by a fourth over the past four years, thereby attaining a rate of 10.8 per 1,000. Together we can save the lives of millions more children.

Millions of children under 5 years of age do not receive early stimulation to develop their intellectual abilities, personality and capacity to socialize. Through the "Holding Hands" programme we have provided our families with the basic tools they need to help their children develop fully. However, my country is small. Similar programmes should be promoted worldwide.

We are proud that, at this moment, there are more children in classrooms that at any other time. However, 120 million, mostly girls, do not attend school.

The illiteracy rate in Costa Rica, is only 4.4 per cent, and we are pleased to note that it is even lower among women. Over the past four years, we have increased secondary education coverage to 83.8 per cent of the population, the highest in Latin America, thanks to a 40.2 per cent increase. The percentage of disabled children who attend regular, as opposed to segregated, schools is also rising. Moreover, we have established a national centre of resources for educational inclusion, unique in Latin America, which will support parents, instructors and special-needs students in the educational process. But to create a society of opportunities for all through more and better education requires the efforts of all countries.

It is estimated that some 30 million children worldwide are the victims of traffickers, who almost invariably elude punishment. In 1999, we promulgated legislation that severely punishes all behaviour associated with that infamous crime. To protect all children from such degradation, we must unite our efforts and work together in cooperation.

Nothing can replace the warmth of a family. But each year, millions of children are born without being acknowledged by their fathers. That had been the case with a third of Costa Rican children. Because this threatened our children's most basic rights, we adopted an innovative reform to our family law that is the most progressive in the world: the law on responsible parenthood. With that law, we broke away from the filiation schemes inherited from Roman law dating from two centuries before Christ. The new law guarantees to all children the fundamental right to know their parents and to be provided by them with spiritual, emotional and, at a minimum, material support. Thus we are rebuilding parenthood in a broad and integral sense. Parenthood, in that sense, has not only a biological but also a cultural meaning and obligates parents to promise to fulfil all the joys and responsibilities of nurturing and educating their offspring.

In the light of the tragedy of the millions of children in the world who still endure rejection and neglect by their parents, we must take action as soon as possible. A mother should have the right to legally record the name of her child's father, even when the child is born out of wedlock. The father should be able to deny the imputed paternity, but only by submitting to a DNA test to prove his claim. In Costa Rica, of the total births recorded last year, 29.3 per cent were of children with an undeclared father; 30.8 per cent of their mothers filed paternity claims under the new law. A year after the law took effect, 91.8 per cent of the men notified as the result of those claims have voluntarily acknowledged their paternity and only 8.2 per cent have objected, opting for the DNA test.

All the efforts that I have mentioned are part of Costa Ricans' comprehensive commitment to our

children and to our young people, which we express through a national agenda for children and adolescents. That agenda represents our country's decision to accord indisputable priority to their needs, rights and opportunities. It is an ambitious agenda with clear goals aimed at substantially improving the living standards of the youngest Costa Ricans in the coming decade.

But we know that there is still a great deal to be done. While a baby dies from preventable causes, while a child does not receive the stimulation that will enable him or her to break free of the cycle of poverty, while a little girl or boy falls victim to sexual exploitation, while there is a girl who cannot attend elementary school or high school, while there is an adolescent who becomes a mother through ignorance or deceit, while there are sad little faces instead of happy little faces, we cannot rest.

We must act. There is no excuse for not doing so. Let us do so with enthusiasm so that the best in our countries will always be for our children and adolescents. They are the promise and the evidence that the best is yet to come. Because they are our present and because they represent our future, it is time to hold out our hands to them and to walk together towards a better mankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aksoltan Ataeva, Chairperson of the delegation of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The issues being considered at this special session of the General Assembly are, owing to their significance, some of the most important and urgent among all the questions that face mankind in the twenty-first century, because their resolution will determine our future. We have come here to declare once more our commitment to the world's children to build a world that serves their interests.

In 1992, when they adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, world leaders outlined a specific Plan of Action and undertook to place children's interests first, to ensure their well-being and to provide every opportunity for the development of their potential. Those extremely important instruments are the basis of the national plan of action that Turkmenistan approved and has implemented since the first days of its independence.

In response to the appeal of the World Summit for Children, Turkmenistan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, acceded to the major international covenants concerning human rights and freedoms and adopted a declaration on Turkmenistan's international obligations in the area of human rights and freedoms. On the initiative of the President of Turkmenistan, Mr. Saparmurat Niyazov, an international workshop on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Central Asia and Kazakhstan was organized in February 1997, and it adopted the Ashgabat Declaration. That document set priorities for national legislation concerning children's rights to survival, development and protection.

The issues of protecting mothers, children and children's rights and freedoms are enshrined in the Constitution and in other legislative acts. The Mejlis, or Parliament, of Turkmenistan has developed a draft law on guarantees of children's rights in Turkmenistan. It is aimed at implementing our policy in the areas of human rights, the legal status of children and the guarantee of their rights and legal interests, of their comprehensive physical and spiritual development and of their upbringing as fully fledged subjects of civil society.

The socio-economic and political reform of Turkmen society is aimed primarily at improving people's well-being, with particular attention to the interests of children, mothers and the family. It is being carried out jointly with international organizations, including United Nations agencies: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization. We are sincerely grateful for the assistance they have provided. The fact that 60 per cent of our budget is directed to social tasks — primarily health care, education, social security and creating favourable conditions for development — is proof of the social orientation of the State's budget policy.

Our President has approved a State programme of health care, education and family support that has allowed us to focus on resolving specific issues within specific time frames. Strengthening the preventive aspect of our actions — immunizing children annually, improving drinking water sanitation and quality, monitoring the environment and improving social and living conditions — has enabled us to achieve positive

results with respect to the health indicators of the population, particularly those of children.

Programmes to promote breastfeeding and to control diarrhoea, anaemia and iodine deficiency are being effectively implemented jointly with UNICEF.

Since 1996, by Government regulation, flour has been enriched with iron, and iodized salt is distributed free to the entire population. A child feeding programme is also being successfully carried out. An effective joint programme with UNFPA on women's reproductive health is having a significant impact in terms of healthy births and maternal health care. A major source of social support for families is the free provision of electricity, gas and water, allowing families to use their budget for good nutrition.

Specific goals have been set to ensure food security for the population, and since 2001 the population has been provided with bread entirely made from grain grown on Turkmen soil. The intensive development of the national economy and food industry has made it possible to increase the variety of consumer products. Gross national income has grown by 17 per cent.

As a result of the measures we have implemented, significant progress has been made in reducing child mortality in the 1-5 age group, in reducing deaths due to diarrhoea and in eliminating cases of iodine deficiency. Since 1997, not a single case of polio has been reported. Anaemia and the maternal death rate have sharply decreased.

Given that key factors of personal development are education and involvement in socio-economic progress, Turkmenistan's education law envisages the comprehensive development of the individual according to national and human values, in the spirit of humanism, democracy, national identity and mutual respect, regardless of nationality and religion. Education is free, making it accessible for the entire population. Orphaned and disabled children are under the personal patronage of the President.

Evaluating our progress to date, we are far from being satisfied and are aware of all our responsibilities in terms of the commitments we have made. The Government is looking for new resources to combat drug addiction and to achieve the goal of making it possible for children to grow in a peaceful and safe environment, enabling them to be active participants in the future of their country and in the future of humankind.

It is our duty to make the world better and to pass it on to the next, deserving generation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to announce that in accordance with resolution 55/276, the co-chairpersons of the round tables will present to the Assembly this afternoon a summary of the discussions held in the round tables. His Excellency Mr. Nambar Enkhbayar, Prime Minister of Mongolia, will present a summary of the discussion held in round table 1. Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, will present a summary of the discussion held in round table 2. His Excellency Mr. Levy Mwanawasa, President of the Republic of Zambia, will present a summary of the discussion held in round table 3.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Helen D'Amato, Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee of Malta.

Ms. D'Amato (Malta): Malta is pleased to join the rest of the international community in an exercise so vital to the well-being of our children. We applaud all parties, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund, for their contribution in organizing the special session and for their tireless efforts aimed at achieving the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since ratifying the Convention in 1990, Malta has intensified its efforts in fostering a child-centred approach. Following the meeting with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, further initiatives were taken to guarantee children's rights, including the withdrawal of our only previous reservation to article 26.

Given that children are members of the family, which is the basic unit of society, our energies have been concentrated on ensuring for them a happy, healthy childhood. During the past years, Malta has undertaken a thorough overhaul of the child care sector. It was my responsibility as chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee in Malta to take stock of existing services for children in need and at risk. Spending considerable time listening to all

stakeholders, including children, was definitely an eye-opener and was most beneficial.

The introduction of an office of a child advocate and the setting up of a family court, will ensure legal representation for children. The children act will incorporate all laws relating to children and will consolidate existing rules. A bill to set up an office of a commissioner or ombudsman for children is expected to be piloted through Parliament shortly.

All of us who have an interest in children's rights must strive to cooperate to ensure quality education for all, regardless of disparities. Whereas in some regions the main concern is increasing the availability of computers, in others electricity may still be a luxury. Whereas some regions have the problem of universities bursting at the seams, others have no seams at all — let alone ones in danger of bursting — because they do not even have primary schools for all children.

Along with education, children deserve quality health care, including action to combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS. In a number of countries, malnutrition remains a threat; in others the threat is obesity. Whatever the issue, it is vital that health be uppermost on our agenda.

Child slavery, child labour and sexual exploitation remain matters of concern to the international community. Although many States are pulling together to combat child pornography, particularly on the Internet, much remains to be done in the realm of child prostitution and sexual abuse.

We also reflect with sadness upon the tragic consequences conflicts and violence have for children. We cannot but express grave concern at the devastation experienced by children caught up in conflicts around the world, particularly those in the boiling cauldrons of the Middle East — a devastation which will undoubtedly leave an indelible mark on the lives of the children affected. Too many children have never seen or lived in peace in their lifetime. Let us not underestimate the traumatic experiences children suffer when growing up in a war-stricken environment or when compelled to participate actively in armed conflict. Often, indeed too often, for this and for numerous other reasons, children end up as refugees or asylum seekers. This calls for international solidarity.

In the quest to establish a family, children may be subject to sale, with persons vying against each other to bid for adoption. While undoubtedly a possible solution for children in need of a home, adoption should not be regarded as a panacea for the problem. It should be well regulated at both the national and the international levels.

Each child is an individual with rights that should not be dictated by anyone else's personal, cultural or medical perceptions. The drafters of the Convention on the Rights of the Child expected us signatories to ensure the true exercise of those rights we agreed to protect.

The signing of the international conventions regulating children's issues should not remain only a pledge. To fulfil that pledge, we have to be fully committed to more stringent implementation, if the secure future of our children is to be assured.

This session is a timely opportunity to take stock of our individual and collective achievements, shortcomings and responsibilities in the field of children's rights. Unless children are empowered to exercise their rights, there is a real danger that their childhood may pass them by, and that would definitely be unfortunate.

Finally, an old proverb says that a man who leaves on a journey never returns home the same man. Let us consider this special session as a special journey. Let us return home different persons; let us return home more committed to ensure a better future that leaves no child behind. We, as parents, all want and strive to provide the very best for our own children. As vision makers, let us invest in all children, whoever and wherever they may be, as if they were our very own children.

On Wednesday, child delegates reminded us that children are not a burden but, rather, an investment. Indeed, they are an investment, a good investment.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Mrs. Maria Isabel Baquerizo de Noboa, Chairperson of the delegation of Ecuador.

Mrs. Baquerizo de Noboa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Much has happened since 11 September 2001. However, our commitment remains strong. The Convention on the Rights of the Child continues to guide our efforts. The recognition of the rights of the child in our Constitution and the granting of citizenship

to all boys, girls and adolescents are a reality in our country.

Since 1999, a year of grave economic and social crisis in Ecuador, we have been working to restore and improve living standards for all. To that end, the Government of President Gustavo Noboa has been systematically increasing social investment as part of the overall State budget. In 2002, that investment to benefit the neediest accounts for 25 per cent of the budget.

Social investment deserves to be supported by international financial institutions — and by the international community in general — by strengthening machinery for cooperation, increasing official development assistance and expanding debt-swapping initiatives to benefit social action, which have proven to be effective for projects and programmes that would otherwise not receive any financing.

We are continuing to take steps to protect all children from premature death and preventable diseases. We have attained 13 of the 22 agreed goals, and no boy or girl is shut out of school or denied basic medical care. We are enforcing our maternity law, through which we managed to save many lives in 2001. We Ecuadorians are proud of having practically eliminated gender-based differences in access to education.

I have the pleasure to inform the Assembly that, in July 2001, Ecuador hosted the first regional encounter on indigenous children, which included the participation of child and adolescent leaders from Guatemala, Mexico, Guyana, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador. The final declaration adopted at the encounter calls on States to adopt holistic, participatory and decentralized public policies that strengthen the cultural diversity of peoples and that include positive action to help indigenous children and adolescents.

In this globalized world, we are no stranger to the phenomenon of migration. Thousands of children and adolescents suffer from the absence of their parents and clamour for the right to live in a family and not to have to migrate or live as refugees or displaced persons. We call for international agreements on the human rights of migrants and family reunification.

Adolescents yearn to help shape the world we live in. Their right to participate is no longer contested, but we still have a long way to go to transform the paradigm that defines adolescence as a problem into one that recognizes them as protagonists and co-participants in fashioning solutions to the problems for which we are all responsible. We need to give back to our young people the ability to love their country by restoring such fundamental values as honesty, loyalty, solidarity and responsibility. I am convinced that they want to pattern themselves after their elders and to be better citizens.

We know all these problems at first hand, and as this is an issue of concern to all countries, at Quito in November 2001 we held the tenth conference of wives of heads of State or Government of the Americas. At that conference, whose theme was "Adolescents of the Americas: forgers of the new millennium", we adopted a declaration and plan of action that is being enacted throughout the region. In that context, allow me to take a few moments to speak of our regional project entitled "Adolescents and young people for a healthy life of caring for the environment". Its goal is to contribute to the sustainable development of Latin America by involving adolescents and young people as strategic players in development and in protecting the environment. To that end, we held a workshop to exchange experiences between the eco-clubs of Ecuador and Paraguay as a way of strengthening existing projects and motivating the rest of our citizens to join in this sustainable initiative.

As to the right to education, we must join our efforts to meet material needs with creative and coherent systems that are attuned to the real world in which we live. Education must be a tool to open doors and create real opportunities. It is for that reason that, at the conference I just mentioned, a number of Latin American countries endorsed the proposal supported by the Organization of American States to create on-the-job learning programmes.

In conclusion, I wish to share the vision of the boys and girls of Ecuador who participated in our National Assembly, convened in May 2001, to evaluate their position with regard to a document entitled "A Just World for Children". That position can be summarized by the following wish-list:

> "All children participating as citizens; all children getting an education; all children being well fed; all children living in a family; all children playing and learning; all children enjoying protection; all

children enjoying health and happiness; all children being treated with respect and affection; all children being free and equal and building a more just world in greater solidarity."

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. John Kaputin, MP, chairman of the delegation of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Kaputin (Papua New Guinea): Papua New Guinea is pleased to take part in this special session. My delegation is warmly appreciative of the excellent preparations. Unfortunately, the need to delay this meeting made it impossible for my Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, to be here in person. His request that I represent him as head of the Papua New Guinea delegation demonstrates the importance that he, the Government and the rest of the nation attach to the rights of the child and to the challenge of making our world fit for children.

Today's children are humanity's future. Children are both the legacy and the inheritors of successive generations. In Papua New Guinea, almost half of the population is under the age of 18. Children are therefore a substantial and significant part of the society in which we live.

In making and implementing the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international community accepted not only that children have rights, but that adults have obligations towards succeeding generations. The idea underlying the Convention and this occasion is not new. It is recognized in the national goals and directive principles, which form part of our Constitution. They commit the entire nation to values which have immediate implications for children's rights. They include integral human development, equality and participation and recognize that Papua New Guinea's rich natural resources and environment are held in trust for future generations.

Our national Constitution establishes a comprehensive human rights regime which guarantees the equality of citizens. It also commits the nation to certain basic social obligations, including the duty of parents to support, assist and educate their children. Thus, many provisions of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child are already constitutionally guaranteed in Papua New Guinea. Moreover, the Constitution not only recognizes human rights; it establishes machinery, including independent courts, to give them practical effect. The institutions set up to help enforce citizens' rights are protected against political interference.

Our system is, obviously, not perfect. The offices it establishes could generally do with more funds and personnel, but Papua New Guinea was clearly committed to respecting and protecting human rights, including children's rights, even before the international Convention on the Rights of the Child was made.

Neither the general thrust nor many specific provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are new. While more needs to be done to inform the community of its rights and to ensure effective enforcement, many key elements have applied in Papua New Guinea since independence in 1975. Additional measures to implement the Convention have been taken since. They include the recent comprehensive amendment of laws protecting children from sexual abuse, including prostitution and violence. The new legislation clearly aligns Papua New Guinea law with the Optional Protocol outlawing the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. This particular Protocol and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict are currently under active consideration with a view to their early formal acceptance.

But rather than detail the various measures that Papua New Guinea has taken to implement the Convention, let me remind this Assembly of a critically important point which appears in the preamble to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and runs through the Convention as a whole. It concerns the need to take a holistic approach. In this respect, providing a comprehensive and integrated approach towards the nation's problems, in which children's rights are safeguarded, advanced and, above all, given substance, Papua New Guinea has a great deal to report.

When the current Government came to office almost three years ago, the Prime Minster committed us to five main objectives. They are to restore the integrity of state institutions; stabilize our national currency and the national budget; remove obstacles to investment and growth; and further the peace process following the conflict that affected Bougainville between 1989 and 1997. Together, these objectives

provide the framework for a holistic approach to dealing with serious economic, social and political problems, including the rights and welfare of children.

The Morauta Government has initiated and is now following through on a wide-ranging and thorough structural adjustment programme to give them effect. The making and management of this programme involve ongoing dialogue with the friends of Papua New Guinea and their active support. In addition to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, these friends include Australia, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand and the People's Republic of China.

While we still have some distance to go in implementing the entire structural adjustment programme, progress to date has been good. It provides a practical framework for further protecting and promoting children's rights in ways that achieve significant, lasting results. Key elements include creating an economic and fiscal environment in which people can pursue their own welfare and Government can provide where Government should, with proper regard for decentralization.

Notable achievements include the application of fiscal reforms and budgetary discipline which have enabled increased outlays on health and education both in real terms and as a proportion — now almost a quarter — of overall government expenditure. Beginning this year, the Government has brought school education within the economic reach of every Papua New Guinean family, regardless of income or wealth, by providing the subsidies which make it possible for pupils to attend school free of charge.

Other achievements include the implementation of public-sector and financial-reform programmes. These are helping to focus and streamline Government activities, achieve savings and improve opportunities for private enterprise to participate more actively in development.

The Government's fifth objective, furthering the Bougainville peace process, led to the signing of a comprehensive Bougainville peace agreement on 30 August 2001. The national Parliament has since voted to help implement the agreement by adding a new part to the Constitution and by enacting a new law on peace-building in Bougainville. The new legislation, which provides for autonomy and a guaranteed referendum on Bougainville's political future, will become operational when weapons disposal has progressed to the stage where the guns in Bougainville are put away in secure, double-locked containers, subject to supervision and with one of the keys held by the United Nations Observer Mission in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

Thus the United Nations Security Council, the Secretariat and specialized agencies are helping to create an environment in which the kinds of issues covered by the second Optional Protocol — dealing with situations of armed conflict — will no longer be relevant in Papua New Guinea. The neutral regional peace monitoring group consisting of unarmed personnel from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and Vanuatu is providing very valuable support. Papua New Guinea looks to our development-cooperation partners for continuing assistance in restoring normalcy in Bougainville.

The proper protection and promotion of children's rights calls for a holistic approach; so does the challenge of creating and maintaining an environment in which the rest of society regards young people as worthy successors and not as drop-outs, push-outs or failures. The two challenges are very closely related. Both must be met. Progress is most likely to be made through a comprehensive and integrated approach.

While Papua New Guinea has not achieved all that we might hope, the foundations and much of the framework of one of the national building-blocks towards a world fit for children are already in place. My delegation therefore welcomes and supports the work of this special session on children.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fuad Mubarak Al-Hinai, Chairman of the delegation of Oman.

Mr. Al-Hinai (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): On the occasion of this special session of the General Assembly on children, we wish to hail Mr. Kofi Annan and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for their committed efforts towards the advancement of children. The General Assembly's adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was clear evidence of a new thrust and of strong support for the efforts of all concerned parties to improve the situation of children in the world.

Oman is committed to reaching the goals of the World Summit for Children, held in 1990. The Sultanate's efforts in the area of child care rest on a few basic foundations. Among our priorities is the spread of education and the provision of social and health services, with the goal of improving the situation of children and meeting their needs to survival, protection and growth. The fruits of those efforts have been recognized in a number of international reports, among them the recent report of the World Health Organization that announced that the Sultanate ranked highest among 191 countries in terms of the quality of health care.

Since 1990, the mortality rate for children under the age of 5 has decreased to 2.4 per cent, and the number of children immunized against childhood diseases has been at 99 to 100 per cent for the last five years. In addition, the Sultanate has remained free of polio for the seventh consecutive year. There have also not been any registered cases of tetanus in the Sultanate since 1992, and no cases of diphtheria since 1993.

Despite all these achievements by the Sultanate, we are still striving to improve the situation of malnutrition among children under the age of 5, to broaden nutritional awareness among the population and to increase the participation of children while concentrating on pre-school education, eradicating illiteracy and activating the role of young adults and giving them the opportunity to participate and express their points of view on issues affecting them. Furthermore, we are promoting the role of social work and updating its mechanisms to cope with new requirements.

The Sultanate of Oman highly values the efforts exerted in preparing the draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children". We reaffirm the importance of the document, which reflects the role of the natural family and focuses on instilling virtues and values into children and adolescents and on the importance of pre-school education.

We feel that it is of the utmost importance to protect children living under embargo, foreign occupation and damaging collective punishment. We reaffirm the need to protect Palestinian children, whose rights under international charters and conventions have been completely obliterated.

We hope that we can achieve the greatest results for children based on international strategies and obligations that provide for each child a safe life, free from fear and deprivation. I wish this special session every success.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Mr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Piot: Ideally, children would grow up in a world without AIDS. But our world is not like that. HIV exists in every corner of the planet, and children and young people are its prime targets. Every day, 6,000 young people under the age of 24 are infected with HIV. Every day, 2,000 infants contract HIV through mother-to-child transmission. Every day, more than 6,000 children are left orphans by AIDS; and every day, 1,600 children die of AIDS. That is the reality.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the programme that brings together eight organizations of the United Nations system in a joint focus on HIV/AIDS, puts young people at the centre of the response to AIDS. Our co-sponsor, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in particular, has responded to the impact of the AIDS epidemic on children in all its aspects.

The tools to protect the world's children from AIDS are known. Using them requires action in three ways: meeting global targets already set, enforcing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and delivering full-scale programmes to mothers, orphans and adolescents.

First, we must be serious about the targets agreed to by all the nations of the world. We have the Millennium Declaration goals, set by the largest gathering of heads of State in history. We have the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted unanimously at the General Assembly's special session on AIDS last June. All share a single vision of a world where the AIDS epidemic is in decline, where fewer young people are infected with HIV, where HIV transmission from mother to child is halved, where orphans are supported, and where we have the resources necessary for the AIDS fight. These targets are empty gestures unless we use them as an instrument of accountability.

Secondly, we must use the Convention on the Rights of the Child as an instrument to combat AIDS. Let me give four examples. Under article 2 of the Convention, children have the right to be protected from stigma; yet children with AIDS, or whose parents have AIDS, are frequently the targets of hate. Under articles 13, 17 and 24, children have the right to information; yet only 60 per cent of young people in the world's most affected countries know the basics about protecting themselves from HIV. Under article 28, children have the right to education; yet last year 1 million African schoolchildren lost their teachers to AIDS. Under article 24, children have the right to the highest attainable standard of health; yet life-prolonging AIDS drugs get to less than 5 per cent of the population that need them.

Thirdly, we must make progress on a clear set of deliverables. In wealthy countries the risk of HIV transmission from mother to child had been cut to 2 per cent. Without intervention that risk can be as high as 30 per cent. Even a single dose of an antiretroviral drug can cut the risk by half. But today less than 5 per cent of pregnant women in sub-Saharan Africa have access to services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. But things are changing. UNAIDS, and in particular our co-sponsoring organization UNICEF, have expanded prevention projects, along with foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The need to respond now also extends to caring for women and families living with HIV.

The number of children orphaned by AIDS has now exceeded 13 million. Their care and protection is an enormous strain, but communities can be helped to cope. Government, community, faith-based women's organizations are cooperating to keep orphans in school, provide food supplies, set up income-generating projects and give psychological support. But it would be shameful hypocrisy to respond to the needs of orphans while ignoring the causes of AIDS. This is a classic instance where intervening upstream is better than trying to cope downstream. We know that proven tools include a combination of life skills and peer education for responsible and safe sexual behaviour, access to condoms and youth-friendly services. But too few of these tools are being applied to mobilize young people to action. Where young people are given the chance to organize themselves, they have shown they can tackle AIDS. In every single country that has been successful in reducing the rate of HIV infection, it was among young people that HIV rates came down first.

When I spoke at the special session on AIDS, last year, I said the world faced two paths: despair or hope. This week's session is a step on the path of hope. May each of us have the courage to let a child take us by the hand and lead us to the future — where fears are confronted, shame is banished and hope kept alive. AIDS is terrible, but we cannot let it claim victory. For the sake of children, we will not.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

Mrs. Tibaijuka: As we have heard many times and in many ways during this special session of the General Assembly, children are truly the most vulnerable human beings on Earth. From birth all the way to adulthood, our children must be properly nourished, protected from danger and disease, cared for in illness, educated to become economically productive, and infused with a system of values that ensures social stability. Most of these difficult tasks naturally fall to parents and are carried out first in the home.

A proper home is both a physical place that affords the child and its family protection from a harsh and menacing world and a psychological space that provides comfort and love. It fosters family integration and strengthens the feeling of belonging, security and human solidarity. Home encompasses the house, the neighbourhood and the community that make up a child's living environment, its habitat.

The tragedy of the child begins when that habitat becomes vulnerable. Premature rural-to-urban migration, armed conflict, forced eviction and natural disasters are some of the more dramatic and devastating threats to the child's environment, leaving far too many children homeless and exposed, without physical or psychological shelter. More chronic and far more prevalent, especially in the slums of our cities, are threats to the child's well-being posed by inadequate housing, poor sanitation, unsafe drinking water, diseases like HIV/AIDS, crime and insecurity.

The Habitat Agenda, the global plan of action adopted at the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul,

recognizes that reducing the vulnerability of the child's living environment is a key to sustainable development. It also recognizes that the needs of children living in difficult circumstances must be given special consideration.

More specifically, the Habitat Agenda declares that adequate shelter must be recognized as an important component of the particular care and assistance to which children and their families, as well as children living outside or without families, have a right. In that regard, the Habitat Agenda calls for special attention to be given to the shelter needs of vulnerable children, such as street children, refugee children and children who are victims of sexual exploitation and violence.

The Habitat Agenda is very clear that adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head. It also means adequate privacy, adequate space, physical accessibility, adequate security, security of tenure, structural stability and durability, adequate lighting, heating and waste-management facilities, suitable environmental quality and health-related factors and, of course, adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities.

Last year, five years after it adopted the Habitat Agenda, the General Assembly — in its Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium (resolution S-25/2) — took note with satisfaction of the growing awareness of the need to address, in an integrated manner, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, lack of basic services and the exclusion of women and children. In that Declaration, the General Assembly also resolved to encourage social and economic policies that are designed to meet the housing needs of families and their individual members, with particular attention to the care of children.

I am pleased to tell the Assembly that through a coordinated set of global campaigns, programmes, field projects and partnerships, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) is working at all levels to improve the living environment for children around the world, particularly in the slums of our cities. In that regard, I wish to announce that, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, UN-HABITAT has launched a global community-based shelter initiative for HIV/AIDS orphans, the number of which have swelled to over 7 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

UN-HABITAT's staff of highly experienced professionals is fully committed to promoting child-friendly human settlements and adequate shelter according to the principles adopted in the Habitat Agenda.

The meeting rose at 2.10 p.m.